

Margaret's Monsters

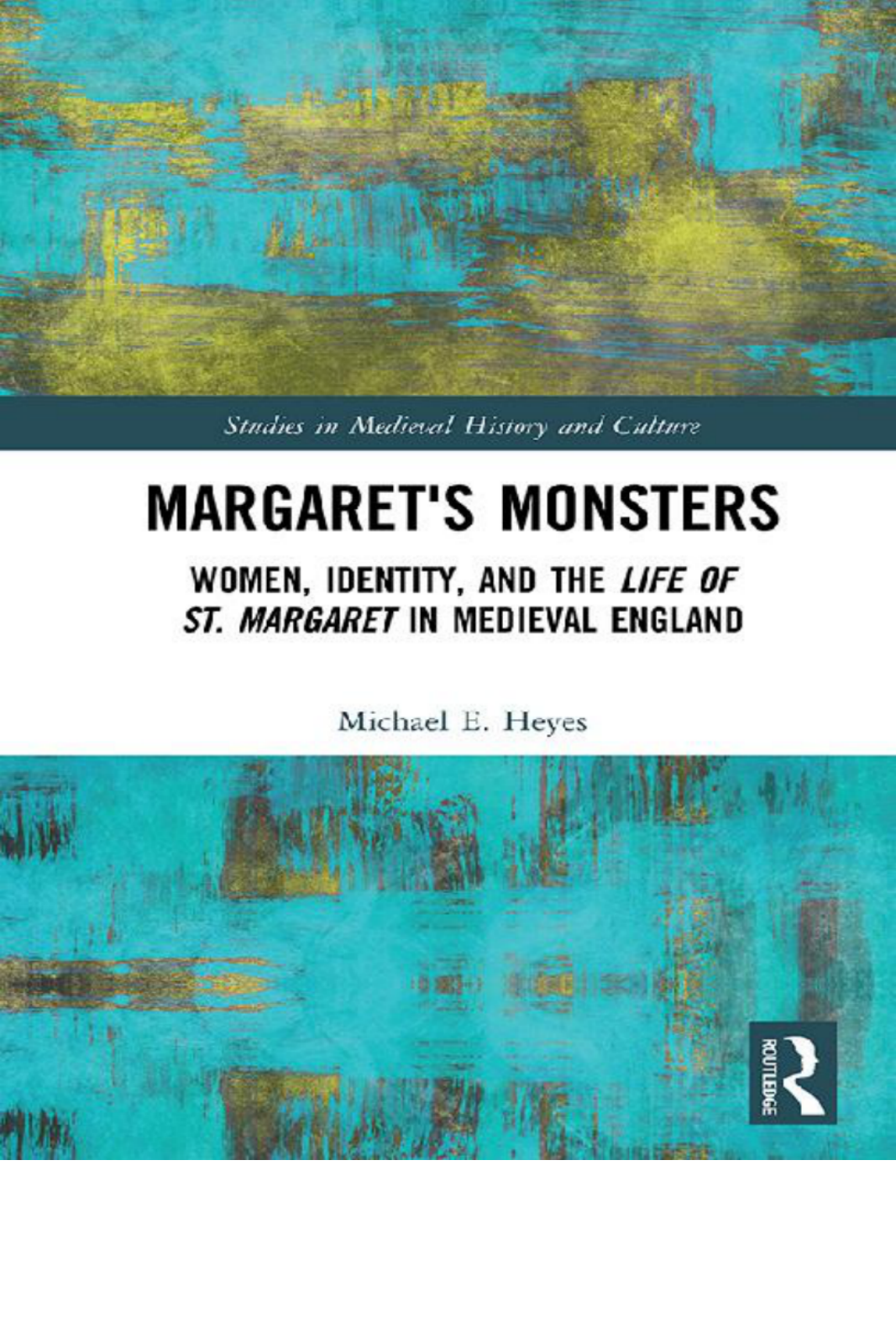
St. Margaret of Antioch was one of the most popular saints in medieval England and, throughout the Middle Ages, the various *Lives of St. Margaret* functioned as a blueprint for a virginal life and supernatural assistance to pregnant women during the dangerous process of labor. In her narrative, Margaret is accosted by various demons and, having defeated each monster in turn, she is taken to the place of her martyrdom where she prays for supernatural boons for her adherents. This book argues that Margaret's monsters are a key element in understanding Margaret's importance to her adherents, specifically how the sexual identities of her adherents were constructed and maintained.

More broadly, this study offers three major contributions to the field of medieval studies: first, it argues for the utility of a diachronic analysis of Saints' Lives literature in a field dominated by synchronic analyses; second, this diachronic analysis is important for interpreting the intertext of Saints' Lives, not only between different Lives, but also between different versions of the same Life; and third, the approach further suggests that the most valuable socio-cultural information in hagiographic literature may be found in the auxiliary characters and not in the figure of the saint him/herself.

Michael E. Heyes is Assistant Professor of Religion at Lycoming College. He has published within the field of monster studies, film, and medieval studies, and his edited volume – *Holy Monsters, Sacred Grotesques: Monstrosity and Religion in Europe and the United States* – contains contributions to all three topics. He is a general editor of *The Journal of Gods and Monsters*. This is his first monograph.

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Studies in Medieval History and Culture

MARGARET'S MONSTERS

WOMEN, IDENTITY, AND THE *LIFE OF*
ST. MARGARET IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

Michael E. Heyes



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Margaret's Monsters

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Medieval England

Michael E. Heyes

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**For Alexander, Evelyn, and Luna: the products of
St. Margaret's blessings.**

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Introduction

BL Harley 2974 is a small Book of Hours bound in brown calfskin with several illustrations. One of these illustrations ([Figure I.1](#)) is an image of St. Margaret of Antioch bursting from the back of a dragon. In the image, Margaret wears a blue cape covering a red dress, and she stares down at the creature that has swallowed her with a look that could be either sadness or disdain. Since most of her lower body is covered by the creature's outstretched wings, the presence of blood to the right side of Margaret – almost blending in to the dragon's side – is the only signifier betraying her bloody, violent exit from the creature. A bit of blue fabric can still be seen in the dragon's mouth, indicating that the creature was in the middle of devouring her when she so rudely interrupted its dinner with her escape.

Figure I.1 St. Margaret emerging from the dragon. © The British Library Board
Harley MS 2974f.165v.

There are dozens upon dozens of such images scattered throughout medieval manuscripts, a testament to Margaret's incredible popularity during the medieval period. In these images, there seem to be no end to the forms Margaret's dragon can take. The creature has been depicted with four legs, two legs, and no legs; has exchanged serpentine features for avian, canine, or leonine; and has borne every color of the rainbow in its coat/hide. Some images – like the one in BL Harley 2974 – feature a dragon that looks defeated, perhaps even timid, but others do not shy from depicting a beast full of ferocity and violence. Even more unusual depictions can be found, such as the tiny lizard-like creature curled at Margaret's feet in “Enthroned Virgin and Child, with Saints” (Master of Veronica, c. 1410 in Cologne, Germany) held at the Philadelphia Museum of Art or the c. 1500 image of “The Marriage of Saint Catherine” at the Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, Budapest featuring Margaret with a fox-like dragon restrained by a leash. Clearly, Margaret's monster – unlike Margaret herself – is open for interpretation, adopting whatever shape and features the artist deems appropriate for their own work.

In fact, somewhat paradoxically, the dragon may be more important to artistic renderings of Margaret than Margaret herself. After all, how would one identify Margaret without her dragon? While the dragon displays remarkably changeable features, there are little to no

identifying features on Margaret's clothing, hair, face, halo or surroundings with which a viewer – medieval or modern – could tell her apart from another female saint. Rather, it is Margaret bursting from her dragon that allows her to be easily identified. Of course, this also suggests the inseparability of Margaret from her monster, a suggestion that I would extend across the many monsters of her *Life*.

Indeed, without the influence of these many monsters, Margaret would not have a narrative at all! It is Olibrius, a demonic monster in mortal skin, who plucks Margaret from her pastoral life and threatens to violate her virginity through torture. It is the dragon that galvanizes the saintly *virtus* that allows her to perform her miracles and pray to God for the benefit of her adherents. And it is the black demon that she subjugates who divulges important demonological lore to her medieval readers. Without her monsters, Margaret's tale would not have ended in her martyrdom, nor would it have reason to promise the extraordinary benefits to parturient mothers and their children that drove Margaret's popularity.

This book explores the monsters of Margaret's *Life* rather than the actions of Margaret herself. It argues that the *Life* is not a stagnant narrative, but rather a story that exists in a state of the perpetual present, and that it is not Margaret that allows the narrative to remain contemporary over the centuries, but her monstrous adversaries. These monsters carry negative indicators of identity, indicators that must be constantly updated in order to effectively guide Margaret's adherents in *imitatio*. In this way, the monstrous antagonists of Margaret's *Life* shape the Christian identity, specifically, the sexual identity, of her adherents just as surely as Margaret herself does. The dragon is the polysemous figure that allowed Margaret to function as an exemplar for a virgin's battle against sexual temptation, as well as to provide comfort to mothers in labor who had succumbed to sexual temptation. The black demon is a mouthpiece for the various didactic teachings of Margaret's redactors, intended sometimes for religious professionals and sometimes for laity. Olibrius, a human figure connected in each version to the demonic, also becomes associated with a plurality of religious identifiers, allowing him to represent perceived sexual threats beyond the boundaries of the Christian community, boundaries which he solidifies against incursion through his torture and execution of Margaret. Finally, Margaret's prayers – and thus the cultic figure of Margaret and the benefits she offers her adherents – are dependent upon the monsters of her *Life*, benefits which ultimately shaped the maternal identity of her adherents.

As these monsters undergo redaction, they become valuable sources of socio-cultural data. As Margaret's redactors consciously and unconsciously alter the details of her narrative, they embed socio-

cultural information into the characters of the *Life*. It is frequently Margaret's monstrous antagonists that manifest the majority of these changes through their ethnicity, body, religious persuasion, and dialogue. Through a diachronic examination of Margaret's monsters, this book reveals the ways in which a dominant cultural group protected their supposed homogeneity by inscribing the imagined hybridity of their opponents on the adversaries of the saint.

This analysis also has wide ramifications for the study of Saints' Lives in general. The shift to a diachronic analysis reveals that not only are Saints' Lives intertextually shaped by other Saints' Lives, but also by previous, well-known versions of the same Saint's Life. Therefore, it only becomes possible to understand fully a particular Saint's Life synchronically after a diachronic analysis. For example, I argue in my second chapter that it is impossible to understand the sexual ramifications of the dragon in the Katherine Group narrative of Margaret without first understanding that the text is responding to previous Mombritius tradition dragons upon which it is based.

Moreover, this intertextuality extends to the antagonists of Saints' Lives as well. Just as the tropes and motifs from one Saints' *Life* are often interchangeable with another,¹ so too are the antagonists of a *Life* related to the antagonists of other *Lives*. Thus, just as Margaret's antagonists do, the antagonists within the corpus of Saints' Lives literature offer a valuable source of socio-cultural data, a source that has been overlooked at times due to the focus of such studies upon the protagonists of a particular *Life*.

The Lives of St. Margaret

Before delving much further into the details surrounding the various Lives, I offer a brief textual history of Margaret. While several Latin traditions² of the *Life* exist,³ the Mombritius tradition was the most popular tradition of the *Life* in England (or elsewhere, for that matter), contributed to the vast majority of vernacular *Lives*, and is the primary focus of this book. Edited as *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* (BHL) 5303 by the Bollandists, the Mombritius tradition – named after the early modern publisher of the *Life* – is one of the oldest traditions of Margaret's tale.⁴ Its earliest known manuscripts date to the 9th century, and given the number of copies from this period, the tradition was likely already quite popular.⁵ The earliest example of the Mombritius tradition in England (early 10th century) is in the manuscript Paris, BN, lat. 5574 (hereafter, Paris version) which will feature prominently in this book.

Mombritius tradition Lives typically open with the narrator, Theotimus, offering his readers a brief autobiography. Trained in the

study of literature and a fervent Christian, Theotimus tells his readers that he purchased and analyzed many sources so that he could write a complete history of the trials that Margaret underwent. Before proceeding to his narrative, Theotimus exhorts his audience to listen to the *Life of St. Margaret* in order to assist with the salvation of their souls.

The narrative then dives into a brief backstory of Margaret. The daughter of a pagan priest and his wife, Margaret is hated by her father from an early age since she was filled with the Holy Spirit. Presumably because of this hatred, Margaret is given to a foster mother some distance from Antioch to be raised, and she becomes so taken with the love of God that she devotes her life and virginity to Jesus Christ. In those days, a cruel leader rules over Antioch, the governor Olibrius. Hateful of Christians, Olibrius takes every opportunity that he can find to consign them to shackles. However, when this same governor passes by Margaret tending her foster mother's sheep, he is so struck by her beauty that he decides he will either purchase her if she is a slave or marry her if she is free. Sending his knights to bring Margaret back, Olibrius is shocked to hear that Margaret has devoted her virginity to Christ and locks her in prison while he debates how he will destroy her commitment to Christianity. Subjecting Margaret to a series of tortures, Olibrius demands that she recant her faith, worship his idols, and marry him. Margaret, despite being beset by tormentors on all sides, maintains her faith and commitment to her virginity and is eventually sent to prison once more to await another round of torture.

As Margaret enters the prison, she prays that God reveal her true opponent. Suddenly, an enormous dragon appears in the corner of the cell. Overcome by fear, Margaret swoons and the dragon swallows her whole. However, this is not Margaret's end: the sign of the cross that Margaret made during her prayers instead expands in the dragon's stomach, splitting it in two and freeing her. A dove appears to congratulate Margaret on her success against the creature. Emerging from the dragon, Margaret then beholds a black demon sitting on the floor. Grabbing the demon by the hair, Margaret viciously beats it into submission and demands that the demon divulge who it is and what it does. The simpering creature admits that it is the demon that inspires sexual lust in others and offers Margaret interesting tidbits of demonological lore before Margaret banishes him into the earth.

Bolstered by her success against her demonic aggressors in prison, Margaret emerges to confront Olibrius again. As Olibrius subjects her to further tortures, Margaret's prayers cause various miracles to occur including shattering an enormous jar in which she is meant to be boiled alive, causing an earthquake to occur, and precipitating

another visitation by a dove. In the wake of these miracles, thousands convert to Christianity and are subsequently martyred by Olibrius. Eventually, Olibrius realizes that he is incapable of swaying Margaret and sends her to be executed. At the place of her execution, Margaret begs her executioner for a moment to pray. Being granted momentary reprieve, she prays for supernatural benefits for her adherents and is martyred. Her body (or sometimes, just her head) is then born aloft toward heaven by angels, and demons are tormented in the wake of her ascension.

This broad narrative informs the majority of the versions of the *Life* under consideration in this book, both Latin and vernacular. As mentioned, the Latin *Life* in the Paris version will be frequently treated, along with another Latin version in London, BL Cotton Nero E.1 (hereafter, Nero version) that is similar in content.⁶ Two Old English *Lives* – the versions of the *Life* in London, BL Cotton Tiberius A.iii (Tiberius version) and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303⁷ (CCC version) – have similar narrative structures, but are likely informed by an older Pre-Mombritius tradition that has since been lost. Finally, Middle English *Lives* based upon the Mombritius tradition will also fall under consideration, including *Seinte Margarete* from the Katherine Group (Katherine Group version), the South English Legendary version, Codex Ashmole 61 version, the “Stanzaic *Life*,” and the *Lyfe* written by John Lydgate (the latter of which are used infrequently enough that they do not require additional designations).⁸

The devil and the details

This book makes several broad arguments: some applicable to all Saints’ Lives; others specific to Margaret. First, I argue for the importance of intertextuality in Saints’ Lives literature. Borrowing between Saints’ Lives and Biblical literature has been an oft-noted phenomenon. In his seminal work on the study of Saints’ Lives, Heffernan recounts Gregory of Tours grammatical discussion for using the singular form of *vita* rather than the plural in the title of his book, *Liber vitae patrum* (literally, *The Book of the Life of the Fathers*). Gregory explains that he holds this preference because “it is clear that it is preferable to speak of the life of the fathers than lives, because, although there is a diversity of merit and virtue, in the world one life nourishes all bodies.”⁹ Thus, while all of the lives of the saints may appear to be different, it is really a radically singular sacrality that is reflected in each. The interchangeable state of Saints’ Lives may be what lead some to view such literature as static or unchanging. Emma Campbell addresses this perception of stasis in *Medieval Saints’ Lives*:

The Gift, Kinship, and Community in Old French Hagiography:

As Duncan Robertson points out, “saints imitate each other, consciously as well as unconsciously imitating Christ, and their lives therefore resemble each other, often to the point of carbon-copy reproduction.” This tendency is perhaps largely responsible for the literary neglect of hagiography as a worthy object of study. Those less generous than Robertson have suggested (with some justification) that the repetitiveness of saints’ lives amounts, at best, to rather flat narrative technique and, at worst, results in uncritical plagiarism.¹⁰

While Campbell correctly refutes the negative implications of this view, I would take it one step further: this borrowing is actually quite useful to historians. In this study, I treat these borrowings as intentional choices on the part of the redactor, choices made due to influence from or a desire to influence the audience. In so doing, I acknowledge that most well-known Saints’ Lives (and even certain portions of these Lives) and Biblical narratives have a distinctive didactic “flavor.” Redactors can then use these different flavors to enhance the didactic “savor” of their own creations. For example, in the Paris version, a dove calls to Margaret “Blessed are you, Margaret, who conquered the world and sought the holy oil. Blessed are you among women, because in your prayers you remembered everyone.”¹¹ This clearly calls to mind Elizabeth’s exclamation to the Virgin Mary – another virgin widely renowned for her protection in childbirth – in Luke 1:42, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!” In this fashion, the redactor “doubles down” on these two elements of Margaret’s *Life* by invoking another saintly figure: Margaret becomes *more* virginal and *more* associated with childbearing by reflecting the Virgin Mary (well known for both). Moreover (as I will show in my first chapter), the choices that a redactor makes in terms of this borrowing can also influence how audience members read characters and symbols in the story.

This intertextuality is also important when considering other versions of a Saints’ *Life*: I argue that synchronic analyses (the most common study in Saints’ Lives literature) are ultimately incomplete unless one also understands the diachronic reception of that Saints’ *Life*. That is, every time that a redactor creates a “new” *Life* of a particular saint it is based upon the redactor’s understanding of other versions of the *Life*, an understanding that must be similar to the intended audience’s lest that *Life* fail to resonate with them. Returning to an example in the study of St. Margaret, the Rebdorf tradition of Margaret’s *Life*¹² contains a prologue that appears to take a critical eye to the supernatural elements common to the Mombritius tradition, as well as an assertion that the redactor will “correct” the mistakes other redactors have made. As a result, the Rebdorf redactor downplays the

demonic elements of the *Life* and includes no prayers for intercession at the end, a fact that likely contributed to the low impact of this version.¹³ This example shows that not only was the Rebendorf redactor intentionally responding with another version of the *Life* in mind, but also that his version was likely rejected because it did not conform to his readership's understanding of the *Life*.

This shift from synchronic to diachronic reading is accompanied by another change to a common tactic in scholarship: this book focuses upon the utility of analyzing the auxiliary characters in a Saint's *Life* rather than the saint himself or herself. In my research, I have found that these characters tend to be far more mutable and changeable than the saint, a fact of which redactors of Lives typically take advantage in order to highlight their didactic messages. Thus, these auxiliary characters can be used to convey important messages to audiences or to guide readers in devotional activities.

Of course, the auxiliary characters that I am most interested in with respect to the *Life of St. Margaret* are the monsters that populate Margaret's narrative. I contend that these monsters are used by redactors to create a sense of the perpetual present in the narrative, a sense that the events of Margaret's *Life* are not completed in the past but rather are ongoing and waiting for the reader or listener to participate in them. Much as the previously discussed artistic renderings generate a new dragon in every image, the redactors of the *Life* carefully craft the monsters to draw the reader into the narrative and reflect current events back to them.

My first chapter – “The Monastic Margaret: The *Life of St. Anthony* and Gregory's *Dialogues* in the *Life*” – focuses on the dragon as an emblem of lust. Beginning with an exposition of Athanasius' *The Life of St. Anthony* and Gregory the Great's *Life of St. Benedict* from the *Dialogues*, I argue that these two Saints' Lives intertextually inform images of the dragon and demon in the Mombritius tradition (as exemplified by the Paris version).¹⁴ In the *Life of St. Anthony*, Anthony is sexually tempted by a “Spirit of Fornication” that is described first as a dragon and then as a little black boy. In the *Life of St. Benedict*, several stories are told in which dragons feature prominently. In each case, the dragon represents some worldly pleasure and being swallowed by the dragon suggests that the one being consumed has succumbed to its temptation. Considering these images, I argue that Margaret can be seen to struggle with her own lust (“personified” by a disturbing hybrid: a man-like dragon with sexually charged features) and emerge from the battle triumphant.

In [Chapter 2](#), “In the Belly of the Beast: Sexual Surrender and Resistance in the *Life*,” I use the field of monster studies, started by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*,¹⁵ to argue

that the monstrous body of the dragon in the Paris version should not be read as draconic but rather as a frighteningly masculine sexual threat.¹⁶ This sexual threat forces two distinct readings from two distinct audiences, both of which would have sought different *imitationes* of Margaret's *Life*.¹⁷ The first group – medieval mothers – would have seen Margaret's encounter with the dragon as a source of hope for survival during childbirth. For these women, Margaret is much like them: someone who struggled with and surrendered to sexual temptation. Yet, Margaret emerges from the dragon “without any injury,” mirroring the way in which medieval mothers wished to escape from their own process of childbirth.

For virginal reception, I turn to the Katherine Group version of the *Life*. This version of the *Life* scorns the sexually charged intertext of the dragon from the Paris version and instead focuses upon the fear that the dragon invokes in Margaret. I trace this fear not to the threat of Margaret's death, but to her prayers that she will emerge from her experience with her virginity “inviolatē.” Corroborating evidence is drawn from another text from the Katherine Group, *Hali Meïðhad*, to show the way in which Margaret can be seen both as an example of right practice for women attempting to maintain their virginity and as a sister in their struggle with sexual temptation.¹⁸

At the same time, both versions feature a scene in which Margaret's contemporary readers are invited to participate in her combat with the dragon. This suggests that Margaret's narrative is not perceived as taking place in a distant time and place; rather, it is reenacted every time that one of her adherents reads the *Life*. Thus, the events of the *Life* are eminently immanent for Margaret's readers.

Chapter 3, “The Devil Made Me Do It: Audience Partitioning and the *Life* of St. Margaret,” uses the versions of the *Life* in the Paris, Katherine Group, and CCC versions and focuses on the didactic speech of the black demon in each. In the Paris version, the dialogue of the black demon suggests the strong monastic roots of the Margaret narrative identified in **Chapter 1**. The demon claims to be responsible for sexual sins with which monks are frequently concerned (i.e., masturbation and nocturnal emission).

In the Katherine Group, the black demon's speech contains a lengthy tale of the demon's influence over an unnamed chaste man and woman unique to this version. The demon indicates that it allows these two individuals to come together and be confident in their platonic friendship, only to strike at them when they least expect it. Filled with lust, the two fall into carnal filthiness, after which the demon counterproductively provides several techniques to avoid their unfortunate fate. I argue that the black demon's speech is directed at an audience very much like – if not the same as – the group of

anchoresses that *Ancrene Wisse* was directed. I then use *Hali Meðhad* and *Ancrene Wisse* to further establish this anchoritic audience, an audience that has been the source of significant debate.¹⁹

Regarding the CCC version, I begin with Elaine Treharne's argument that the original audience was "monastic and ascetic."²⁰ While acknowledging that Treharne is likely correct, I point out that the black demon's speech suggests the presence of another audience beside the monastic: a rural lay audience likely given over to the pastoral care of the monastic audience who wrote the text. In particular, I interpret the sin of bestiality to which the black demon refers – unique to the CCC version and (as Peter Dendle has pointed out) strangely explicit for non-penitential literature²¹ – as evidence of this additional audience.

Again, what emerges from this is a Margaret whose narrative is eminently contemporary. Instead of a static figure with a canned speech, the black demon's narrative is frequently being updated to reflect the sexual needs of the audience. Through this supernaturally charged speech, the redactors of the *Life* controlled a powerful means to curb or encourage patterns of sexual behavior in their audience.

Turning from the more obvious monsters in the *Life*, the fourth chapter – "Circumcising Olibrius: Threatening Sexuality and Religious Alterity in the *Life of St. Margaret*" – addresses the different depictions – particularly, religious depictions – of the prefect who accosts Margaret. While a significant amount of the research concerning the various *Lives* characterizes Olibrius as a Roman pagan prefect, I argue that this attribution obscures the mutable nature of Olibrius' religious identity, a mutability that quickly becomes apparent when diachronically and intertextually read. Rather, the Mombritius tradition contains markers of both pagan and Jewish identity,²² rendering Olibrius' religious identity as simply "un-Christian."²³ This un-Christian identity is subject to change, in some versions becoming "more Jewish," while others add markers for a Saracen identity.²⁴

While Olibrius' religious identity is subject to alteration, his association with the demonic is not. In the earliest narratives, Olibrius' threats draw the reader into a comparison between the prefect and the dragon in Margaret's cell. This association continues to grow diachronically, until the black demon of the Codex Ashmole 61 version claims he was summoned by Olibrius' necromancy. This association with the ultimate antithesis of Christianity further exacerbates Olibrius' un-Christian identity.

This had a profound effect upon the way Margaret's readers understood proximal religious groups. In the context of the narrative, Margaret's struggle against Olibrius is not simply the struggle of a long-dead, young woman against a cruel overlord. Instead, it is the

struggle of Christianity against its contemporary opponents, the virtuous against the demonic, and the Christian against the un-Christian. Margaret's rejection of Olibrius becomes the rejection of the un-Christian by the Christian, a rejection that reinforces the necessity of sexual boundaries between the two.

Finally, I turn to the prayers at the end of Margaret's *Life* in order to evaluate her role as a patron of women in childbirth. Through her struggle with her monstrous opponents, Margaret acquires the sanctity required to pray for the benefit of her adherents. In my final chapter – "Paging Dr. Margaret: Prayers and Pregnancy in the *Life of St. Margaret*" – I explore what these prayers mean for the representation of Margaret in her cult. Specifically, I argue that Margaret begins her cultic existence in England as a castigator of demons, a role that associates her only peripherally with safe childbirth via the ability to prevent demonic ailments.²⁵ This role is relatively static for several centuries until the explosion of vernacular *Lives* in the 13th century and beyond. Due to the increasing influence of Margaret's maternal adherents,²⁶ these *Lives* intertextually incorporate the Caligula tradition's blessings for parturient women into vernacular versions that rely upon the Mombritus tradition. At first, these *Lives* struggle to create an identity for Margaret that merges her role against demons and her role as a guardian over expectant mothers, but eventually Margaret's protection against demons vanishes, to be replaced by an image of Margaret as a women's advocate with a sympathetic connection to her adherents.

This can help us explain why Margaret being swallowed and her blessings for parturient women are often connected together, as there is little textual evidence in the *Lives* to suggest such a connection. I propose that women developed this association for their own benefit in labor; add to the major interpretations of this association – the dragon as mother, labor, and womb – my own interpretation of the dragon as lying-in room; and suggest that all four may have benefited women in the frequently lethal process of labor. Of course, the notion that Margaret's *Life* is undergoing such redaction for the benefit of her maternal adherents once more underscores the primary thesis of this work: Margaret is not a static narrative, but instead a dynamic story whose content is consistently being updated through the monsters of her *Life*.

Notes

- 1 See especially Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- 2 I have chosen to make use of the term "tradition" to define broadly interrelated

groups of the *Life of St. Margaret* such as the Mombritus, Casinensis, Turin, etc. (see below). My choice is guided by the fact that the more often used term of “version” (e.g., the use of “Mombritus version” to any of the *Life* variants classified as BHL 5303) suggests far more similarity between texts than were necessarily found in this study. Thus, it seems more appropriate to describe variants of – say – the Mombritus as versions of a particular tradition rather than simply an instance of a particular version of the text.

- 3 These traditions include BHL 5304 (the Casinensis tradition), BHL 5305 (the Paris tradition), BHL 5308 (the Rebdorf tradition), and the Turin tradition, formerly designated under BHL 5303 but shown by JE Cross to be distinct from the designation. For more information on these versions of the *Life*, including their principal manuscripts, see Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), [Chapter 2](#). For a more thorough and expansive treatment of the *Lives* in Medieval England, see Juliana Dresvina, *A Maid with a Dragon: The Cult of St Margaret of Antioch in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). The Caligula tradition of the *Life*, which will also be featured in one chapter of this book, will be discussed below.
- 4 The Greek tradition represented by BHG 1165 appears to be older still. Hermann Usener published one of the most widely used versions of the tradition in “Acta S. Marinae et S. Christophori,” in *Festschrift zur Fünften Säcularfeier der Carl-Ruprechts-Universität zu Heidelberg* (Bonn: Universitäts-buchdruckerei von C. Georgi, 1886).
- 5 Clayton and Magennis list five 9th-century copies of the Mombritus tradition: Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Augiensis perg. 32 (Aug); Saint-Omer Bibl. mun 202 and 257; Reims, Bibl. mun., 1395 (K. 784), and Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 649 (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 7–8).
- 6 Paris, BN, lat. 5574 can be found in Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives*, Appendix 2 while BL Cotton Nero E.1 is currently only held at the British Library.
- 7 Both of which can be found in Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives*, 112–148; 152–180.
- 8 Respectively, Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrène Wisse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Charlotte D’Evelyn and Anna Jean Mill, *The South English Legendary: Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 145 and British Museum MS Harley 2277, Etc (Volume 1: Text)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956); George Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008); and the final two in Sherry L. Reames, *Middle English Legends of Women Saints* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003).
- 9 Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 7.
- 10 Emma Campbell, *Medieval Saints’ Lives: The Gift, Kinship and Community in Old French Hagiography* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 7.
- 11 *Beata es, Margareta, qui uicisti mundum et quesisti oleum sanctum. Beata es inter mulieres, quia in orationibus tuis omnes memorasti* (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives*, 214). Translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.
- 12 BHL 5308 Version 4; named after the Augustinian Monastery of Rebdorf where its manuscript is located (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives*, 19).
- 13 Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives*, 19–20.
- 14 In this respect, this chapter is similar to some synchronic research that has addressed points of comparison between certain versions of Margaret and other

draconic adversaries such as Katherine Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) and Jocelyn Price, “The Virgin and the Dragon: The Demonology of Sainte Margarete,” in *Sources and Relations: Studies in Honour of J. E. Cross*, ed. Marie Collins, Jocelyn Price, and Andrew Hamer (Leeds: University of Leeds Press, 1985), 337–357. Nevertheless, it represents a departure from this material by reading Margaret alongside other Saints’ Lives literature.

- 15 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3–25.
- 16 In this respect, I am following a pattern laid out by Cohen and other researchers in reading the physical bodies of a monster as a reflection of the social anxieties that created them, in this case sexuality. See for instance Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), esp “On Saracen Enjoyment”; Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender, and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, Gender in the Middle Ages (Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 2010); and Samantha J.E. Riches, “Virtue and Violence: Saints, Monsters and Sexuality in Medieval Culture,” in *Medieval Sexuality: A Casebook*, ed. April Harper and Caroline Proctor (New York: Routledge, 2008), 59–78.
- 17 For more on the notion of *imitatio* in the medieval period, see Caroline Walker Bynum’s work, including *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001); *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982); *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); and *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).
- 18 Likely, the insights from this chapter are not limited to the Katherine Group, but rather to virgins building virginal identities through Margaret in general. For example, Sarah Salih argues that Margery Kempe drew on a version – or versions – of Margaret that “‘celebrated the exploits of a charismatic heroine who defies society and humiliates her adversary’ and in which ‘the authority, strength, and desires of men are invariably the objects of contempt’” (Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001], 196). Through her identification with Margaret, Salih claims that Margery Kempe sought to construct an identity that drew on virginal hagiography. See also Julie E. Fromer, “Spectators of Martyrdom: Corporeality and Sexuality in the Liflade Ant Te Passiun of Sainte Margarete,” in *Intersections of Sexuality and the Divine in Medieval Culture*, ed. Susannah Mary Chewning (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 89–106.
- 19 See for instance Julie Bond Hassel, *Choosing Not to Marry: Women and Autonomy in the Katherine Group* (New York: Routledge, 2002) and Karolyn Kinane, “To Imitate and Inspire Awe: Enclosure and Audiences in the Katherine Group Saints’ Lives,” *Magistra* 17, no. 2 (2011): 32–52.
- 20 Elaine Treharne, “A Note on the Sensational Old English Life of St Margaret,” in *Saints and Scholars: New Perspectives on Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture in Honour of Hugh Magennis* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), 8.
- 21 Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 55.
- 22 Ruth Evans, “The Jew, the Host and the Virgin Martyr: Fantasies of the Sentient Body,” in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Sarah Salih, Anke Bernau, and Ruth

- Evans (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 167–186 for this mixture in the Paris version.
- 23 Though not directly related, my conception of these binary opposites – what I address as negative markers of identity – is at least partly informed by my reading of Dyan Elliott, “Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc,” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (2002): 26–54 and her notion of a “shadow text.”
 - 24 See for instance Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
 - 25 It bears mention that the Caligula tradition will be briefly featured in this chapter. First identified by Elizabeth Francis, the Caligula – so named for the manuscript in which it was discovered – London, BL Cotton Caligula A.viii – differs from the Mombritius narrative in several ways. Most notably for this work is the fact that the Caligula dragon does not swallow Margaret, and Margaret’s prayers at the end of her *Life* contain blessings for parturient women, whereas the majority of the Mombritius versions do not.
 - 26 Here I am expanding on Wendy R. Larson’s claim that vernacular *Lives* show a significantly greater lay influence than Latin *Lives*. See “Who Is the Master of This Narrative?: Maternal Patronage of the Cult of St. Margaret,” in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 94–104.

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1 The monastic Margaret

The *Life of St. Anthony* and Gregory's *Dialogues in the Life*

Although the *Life of St. Margaret* overflows with dramatic scenes, the time Margaret spends in prison is arguably the most gripping. In the iconic, Mombritius tradition account of this scene, Margaret is thrown into a dungeon after being tortured by her persecutor Olibrius. In her cell, Margaret prays to God that her real adversary should be revealed to her. Suddenly, out of the dark corner of her prison, a terrible dragon emerges, spewing smoke and fire and hissing menacingly. Overcome by fright, Margaret crumples to the floor and the dragon – eager for its meal – slithers over to Margaret and devours her. However, when all seems lost, a miraculous thing happens: the sign of the cross, which Margaret so recently made during her prayers, splits the dragon in twain and our hero emerges unscathed. With her true opponent defeated, Margaret is armed with a new courage, a courage she uses to battle another demon that appears – this time, in the shape of a black-skinned man – in a violent and one-sided struggle. Planting her foot on its neck, Margaret orders the creature to divulge bits of demonological lore for the benefit of her eager readers.

Considering the importance that the dragon plays in Margaret's medieval iconography, the scholarly analysis surrounding the scene is particularly rich. The majority of these analyses address the potential sexual content and imagery that suffuses the dragon. On some level, this is only natural: as Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff writes regarding Margaret (and other saints who encounter dragons), “there can be little doubt that for most medieval persons the serpent and dragon imagery in these female saints' lives was symbolic of the threat of sexuality.”¹ Interpretation of this threat of sexuality has ranged from general² to specific,³ but the majority of scholars working across multiple versions of the text seem to conclude that the threat the dragon presents is specifically sexual in nature.⁴ Particularly important to my treatment of the scene in this chapter is Maud Burnett McInerney's assertion that the Katherine Group Margaret is “fully masculine”⁵ and the demon that follows a destroyer of virginity by his own admission.⁶

The majority of this research depends upon a synchronic reading of

Margaret as a self-contained production or in relation to peripheral material.⁷ In this chapter, I argue that Margaret's prison scene is most effectively read against the demonic backdrop of *The Life of St. Anthony* and the second book of Gregory's *Dialogues*, *The Life of St. Benedict*, both of which form an important intertext for understanding the Mombritius tradition's demons.⁸ I begin with an analysis of the little black boy in the *Life of St. Anthony* and move on to the appearance of several dragons in Gregory's *Dialogues*, paying attention to the representation of both types of creatures. I then compare these two works to the Paris version of the *Life of St. Margaret*. In so doing, I argue that the demon and dragon in Margaret's prison scene are derived from similar characters in the *Life of St. Anthony* and Gregory's *Dialogues*. The evidence from each suggests that Margaret's encounter with the dragon in the Mombritius tradition is meant to be read in the same fashion as Anthony's encounter with his demon: as a struggle with her own lust.

The Life of St. Anthony and Gregory's Dialogues

The Life of St. Anthony was written in Greek by Athanasius of Alexandria after Anthony's death in 352 and translated into Latin shortly thereafter by Evagrius of Antioch in the second half of the 4th century.⁹ The *Life* describes the career of the desert monk Anthony who forsakes the city in favor of a pious life in the wastelands. In so doing, he attracts demonic attention and is forced to battle the forces of the Devil to secure the desert as a dwelling place for eremites.

Anthony's *Life* was immensely popular throughout the Middle Ages. From the time of its writing, Anthony's struggles with his demonic adversaries have been a source of *imitatio* for those living eremitic and monastic lives,¹⁰ one of the stated goals of Athanasius for recording the *Life*.¹¹ The *Life of St. Anthony* features prominently in the eighth book of Augustine's *Confessions* as one of the principal texts to inspire him to renounce worldly pleasures. Jerome's lives of Paul and Hilarion are conscious imitations of Anthony,¹² the *Life of St. Guthlac* is closely modeled on the Latin version of Anthony's *Life*,¹³ and Anthony's *vita* functions as a model for Benedict's in Gregory's *Dialogues* (to be discussed later).¹⁴ Add to this the "*ingens numerus* of Latin manuscripts, and the imitation of its details in countless monastic biographies,"¹⁵ and it is clear that the *Life of St. Anthony* looms large in the minds of religious writers during the medieval period.

Anthony's interactions with the so-called Spirit of Fornication are particularly important for the interpretation of Margaret's prison scene. Having decided to live a pious life, Anthony strives to discipline himself. However, the devil cannot bear such virtue in a young man

and sets about attempting to lead him from his strict discipline. Among other things, he tries to remind Anthony of his worldly responsibilities, attempts to incite greed and gluttony in him, and warns him of the enormous effort involved in the eremitic life. When these fail to dissuade the young man, the devil goes so far as to inflame Anthony's passions and appear before him as a seductive woman in an attempt to ruin Anthony's chastity. To counter these demonic thoughts and visions, Anthony "comforts" himself with thoughts of hell and bodily decay until the creature realizes that it is unable to sway him from his path:

Afterwards, when that most hideous dragon was unable to destroy Anthony through this appeal, and saw that he was always repelled by his thoughts, according to what has been written: Gnashing his teeth and wailing, just as he really is, he manifested in his appearance as a horrid and black boy, falling to his knees, he wept in a human voice, saying, "I have seduced many, I have deceived more, but now as by the other saints, so also I am overcome by your labor." When Anthony asked who he was that he said such things, he said, "I am the friend of fornication, and I have taken up the manifold arms of baseness against all adolescents, such that I am called the Spirit of Fornication! How many devoted to living in chastity have I deceived! How many weakly starting off have I persuaded to return to their original filth. I am he regarding whom the prophet scolds the fallen, saying 'You have been seduced by the Spirit of Fornication!' and truly they were overthrown by me. I am he who often tested you and was always repulsed." When the soldier of Christ heard this, giving thanks to God, strengthened with a greater bravery against his adversary, he said: "You are very despicable and contemptible; for both your obscurity and your age are signs of weakness. From now on there will be no more trouble from you. The Lord is my helper, and I will rejoice over my enemies." And then, at the sound of this psalm [*vocem cantantis*], the phantasm that had appeared, vanished.¹⁶

After seeing that he is unable to sway Anthony with his charms, the *spiritus fornicationis* – specifically identified as a *draco* – gives up and appears to Anthony in another form. Rather than adopting an aggressive posture, the creature appears to Anthony as a little black boy in a dejected state (i.e., on his knees). This submissive posture signals that Anthony has overcome the demon, which no longer troubles him but instead proceeds to reveal to Anthony the various ways in which he leads individuals astray through his sexual "weapons" (*arma*). After listening to the various operations of the demon, Anthony berates the creature, who disappears.

The main component of the demon's assault is reminding Anthony of the worldly pleasures that he will leave behind. Although Anthony

hears thoughts that are not his own, perceives visions, and has a demon appear before him, all of these attacks highlight very human concerns: the disposition of his family, concerns over material prosperity, and the undoubtedly raging carnal desires of a young man. From a narrative perspective, these concerns are personified in the figure of the little black boy,¹⁷ a demonic incarnation of the internal struggle that is raging in his mind (and loins).¹⁸ That this internal struggle is primarily a struggle with sexual temptation is later confirmed by the demon. Though no one else sees these assaults, visions such as Anthony perceived were viewed by readers as a manipulation of internal weakness by demonic forces, demonic forces that were not necessarily visible or physically tangible to anyone save the individual undergoing the struggle.¹⁹

Although there is only the briefest mention of a dragon in *The Life of St. Anthony*, Gregory's *Dialogues* have several far more substantial portrayals of dragons.²⁰ The *Dialogues* is a collection of miracles and wonders performed primarily by monastic holy men of 6th-century Italy. Containing four books, the second is entirely devoted to Benedict of Nursia, and Gregory's indebtedness to the *Life of St. Anthony* for Benedict's *Life* has already been noted.²¹

Since all of the draconic encounters are so similar – at least, for the purposes of this analysis – I will treat the text of each before turning to my argument. In the first of Gregory's stories that contain a dragon (Book 2; chapter 25), a monk – despite being repeatedly chastised by Benedict – decides to leave the monastery. Setting off on the road:

No sooner had he left the monastery, than he discovered a dragon in his way waiting for him with an open mouth. And when he saw that the dragon was intent on devouring him, he began shivering and trembling and to cry out in a great voice, saying "Hurry, hurry, because this dragon wants to devour me!" The monks running to him saw no dragon, but they led the shivering and trembling monk back to the monastery. Then he promised he would never again leave the monastery, and from that very hour he made good on his promise: for obviously through the prayers of the holy man he saw the dragon that was waiting for him, whom he first followed without seeing it.²²

The second draconic appearance (Book 4; chapter 37) features one of Gregory's own charges, a monk named Theodorus who is barely worthy of the title. Despising anything good for his soul, he finally lies close to death when abruptly he shouts at his brothers:

"Leave me! Behold, I have been given to a dragon to be devoured that is not able to eat me due to your presence. Even now, he has swallowed my head into his mouth. Leave now so that you do not increase my suffering, but let it do what it will do. If I am given to it to be devoured, why must I bear your delays?" Then the brothers

began to say to him: "What are you talking about, brother? Bless yourself with the sign of the holy cross." He responded with great shouts, saying: "I want to but I can't, because I am held fast by the scales of this dragon." And when the brothers heard, prostrating themselves on the ground with tears they began to pray more vehemently for his freedom. And behold, suddenly the sick brother began to shout with a great voice, saying: "Grace be to God! Behold, the dragon who sought to devour me has fled. He was banished by your prayers and was unable to remain. Now, intercede for my sins, because I am prepared to convert and utterly renounce the worldly life."²³

Finally, Gregory tells the story of a nameless monk in the monastery of Thongolaton. Appearing to be a great man in life, as he dies the monk confesses to his fellows his dalliance with gluttony:

"When you thought that I fasted with you, I ate in secret. And now behold, I am delivered up to a dragon to be devoured: it has wrapped its tail around my feet and knees, and is placing its head in my mouth and, drinking, it withdraws my spirit." Then having said these things he immediately died, and did not wait to be able to be liberated by repentance from the dragon that he saw. Which indisputably establishes that he saw it for the sole utility of his audience, since he both made known the enemy to whom he had been given and did not escape.²⁴

The motif of the dragon is used in all three of these passages as either a metaphoric or literal and visual representation of an internal struggle with some form of temptation. For Anthony, this internal struggle is with a plethora of sensual temptations: gluttony, sex, and worldly responsibilities and pleasures.²⁵ Similarly, the monks in Gregory's *Dialogues* struggle with their fitness for the monastic lifestyle and their attachments to worldly pleasures. In the first story, the monk is clearly scared to death by the creature's appearance and returns to the monastic community, indicating that the dragon was waiting for the monk to succumb to the temptation of worldly pleasures.²⁶ In the second story, we find much the same situation: Theodorus hates living his life as a monk and only renounces "worldly life" (*saecularum uitam*) when his brothers have saved him from the predations of the dragon on his death bed. In the third story, the temptation is more specific: the monk is a glutton who cannot overcome the temptation of food when his brothers fast. In failing, he is devoured by the dragon as a warning to those watching. In essence, both Anthony and the monks are struggling with (and sometimes failing in) their ability to maintain the challenging lifestyle that they have chosen.

There is notably something present in Gregory's *Dialogues* that we

do not see in the *Life of St. Anthony*: unlike the nearly spiritually invulnerable Anthony, the monks in question partially or wholly succumb to temptation. In all three cases, this temptation is represented by a dragon, while succumbing to the temptation is depicted as the threat or act of being swallowed by the same.

In both Anthony's and Gregory's narratives, the creature is a silent signifier: the dragon never speaks a word. Rather, it is others who are forced to interpret the significance of the dragon. In the *Dialogues*, it falls to the three monks to explain the meaning of their own dragons to their frightened brothers. On the other hand, Anthony's struggle with his dragon is explained by the demonic creature himself in the form of a little black boy. While the creature afflicts him with numerous desires, the form of temptation that the "dragon" levies on him that receives the most attention in the *Life of St. Anthony* is sexual in nature. Not surprisingly, this is also the temptation that the demon concentrates its explanation upon, even going so far as to identify itself as the "Spirit of Fornication."

Borrowed demons

The Mombritius tradition of Margaret draws elements from both *The Life of St. Anthony* and Gregory's *Dialogues* to inform its demonic host. Anthony's "Spirit of Fornication" makes an appearance in the Mombritius tradition as the black demon that illuminates the sexual nature of Margaret's draconic adversary. Similarly, Margaret's dragon is related to the dragons of the *Dialogues* as a source of silent temptation, a temptation to which characters succumb through swallowing.

Keeping these representations in mind, I turn to the early English representation of the Mombritius tradition in the Paris version. We pick up the story as Margaret is thrown in prison, where she prays to God that she might "see my enemy who fights with me."²⁷ With her prayer completed:

Behold: suddenly from the corner of the prison came a horrible dragon completely gilded with various colors of hair and with a golden beard. Its teeth were like the sharpest iron. Its eyes shone like a flame of fire, and it blew flame and smoke from its nostrils, and its tongue was panting over its neck, and it seemed as if a two-edged sword was in its hands. For it was terrible and made a stench in the prison from the same fire which issued from its mouth. And St Margaret became as pale as grass and the fear of death came upon her and all her bones were shattered ... The dragon opened its mouth and placed it over the head of the blessed Margaret and extended its tongue over her heel and swallowed her into its stomach. But Christ's Cross, which the

blessed Margaret had made over herself, expanded in the mouth of the dragon and split it in two parts. Then, blessed Margaret came out of the dragon's belly without any injury to her.²⁸

After Margaret's conquest of the dragon, she offers a prayer of thanks to God. When her prayer is completed:

She looked to the left side of the prison and behold she saw another devil sitting, like a black man with his hands clasped around his knees. And he rose and began to walk towards her and grasped her hand. Then Margaret said to the demon, "Let what you have done be enough. Leave me now, for you have perpetrated many evil deeds." The demon responded, "Indeed, I sent my brother Rufo to you in the likeness of a dragon in order that he might swallow you and bear your memory from the earth. But you destroyed him with the sign of Christ. Do you now wish to destroy me with your prayer as well?" Then the holy virgin Margaret seized the demon by his hair and threw him to the ground, and she placed her right foot over his neck and said to him, "Cease your attempts on my virginity, evil one."²⁹

After the second demon is subdued, a cross appears, shining with light. A dove sitting upon the cross praises Margaret, after which she demands that the demon tell her about itself. After an account of its demonic genealogy, the black demon begins to relate its works to Margaret:

"I am he who snatched away the labors of many. I am he who fights with the just and inflames their kidneys and blinds their eyes and makes them forget all heavenly wisdom. And when they are asleep I come over them and wake them from sleep to wicked works, and those I am unable to move from sleep I cause to sin in their sleep. By whatever art possible I inspire [to lust] those I find without the sign of Christ's Cross and I never cease to fight against them or do them harm. But those whom I find sealed with the sign of the cross and who are similar to you, I leave confused and empty-handed, just as I do from you today. O blessed Margaret, what can I say? I have been overcome by you. I do not know what I am to do! All my arms have been destroyed, my strength is confounded, and I am overcome by a tender girl."³⁰

The demon then tries to tempt Margaret with information regarding it and its kind. Soundly rejecting its offer, Margaret banishes the demon beneath the earth.

Comparing St. Margaret to St. Anthony yields several striking similarities between the two texts. First, both Anthony and Margaret feature demons described (or alluded to) first as a dragon and second as a black-skinned male figure. With the dragon defeated in each tale, the black man/boy then emerges to confront the saint in a gesture of contrition or subjection (in Anthony's case, by falling to his knees, in

Margaret's case, by appearing seated with hands wrapped around knees in something of an upright fetal position or position of child-like worry). The black demons in each story then relate their works to the saints, both of whom describe these acts as their *arma* and all of which are focused on leading people to sexual sin. After bewailing their defeat, both demons are then banished at the command of their respective "tormenters."

Margaret's dragon also embodies a temptation to stray from Margaret's chosen path, just as Anthony's dragon and those of Gregory's monks did in their narratives. In the beginning of the narrative, Olibrius is overcome with sexual desire for Margaret. When it is revealed to Olibrius that Margaret is Christian, he takes a carrot and stick approach to having her renounce her Christianity: for as long as she remains Christian, he will subject her to gruesome tortures, but should she renounce her faith he promises her wealth, status, and sexual pleasure. When Margaret is first brought before Olibrius, he declares:

Moreover, give in to me and adore my gods and I will give you great wealth and it will be good for you above all my household ... If you do not worship my gods, my sword will devour your flesh and I will destroy your bones over a burning fire. But if you obey me and worship my gods and join your body with mine in love, behold, before everyone I say to you I will accept you as my bride and it will be as good for you as it is for me.³¹

The offers that Olibrius makes are reminiscent of the worldly pleasures of which the Spirit of Fornication attempts to remind Anthony: wealth, social belonging, and sexual fulfillment. Just like Anthony, Margaret has her eye on the ultimate prize, and she persistently rejects these offers from Olibrius, insulting him and claiming that greater rewards await her in heaven.

This exchange of insults and tortures is a well-worn trope in virgin martyr stories. McNerney notes Eulalia of Prudentius' *Peristephanon* incites anger in her judge by denouncing idol worship and openly inviting her own rape,³² and St. Cecile's passionate repudiation of her judge in Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale* causes him to demand that she be boiled to death in her own home.³³ The popular *Lives* of St. Catherine and St. Barbara also feature the martyrs of their respective stories insulting their judges with injurious consequences: St. Catherine insults the emperor and invites him to torture her (resulting in the famous wheels which feature so prominently in her iconography),³⁴ and St. Barbara insults the false gods of her judge filling him with rage and resulting in her various tortures.³⁵

However, among all of these virgin martyrs, Margaret stands out in her first prayer to God in the prison. In asking to see her true

opponent, she rejects what may be the audience's assumption that Olibrius is her enemy. This drives home an important point about virgin martyrdom: there are no human opponents. Rather the judge of each martyrdom functions as an unwitting partner to demons and instrument of the virgin's death and exaltation. The effect of this prayer is instantaneous: the dragon appears in the corner of the prison and advances on Margaret. The dragon then is her true opponent. Yet, in both the *Life of St. Anthony* and Gregory's *Dialogues*, we have seen that the dragon is the external embodiment of an internal struggle with sin or moral failing.

With an echo of both Anthony and Benedict, it is not the dragon that supplies the explanation but the victim (Margaret) and the black demon. When the black demon appears and acknowledges Margaret's superiority, she throws him to the ground and demands that he cease his attempts on her virginity. Once the black demon has recovered slightly from his melee with Margaret, he admits that he is the demon who leads the faithful away with sexual desire and that he was the one who sent the dragon to swallow her. As in Anthony, the demon then wails to Margaret that his *arma* have been destroyed by her actions and that he has been brought to shame by his defeat at the hands of a tender girl. Like *Anthony* and the *Dialogues*, the dragon represents a temptation, a temptation which the black demon identifies by its presence and words as a sexual one. Margaret's struggle is with sexual temptation, a fact that is not surprising given the fact that she need only submit to Olibrius' sexual advances in order to receive a reprieve from heinous torture as well as the worldly pleasures of wealth, esteem, and sexual enjoyment.

While consideration of such temptations might seem ludicrous in the context of a virgin martyr legend, Margaret is not depicted as a bastion of resistance and spiritual fortitude at the beginning of her *Life*, but rather as a profoundly human figure (a depiction that makes her more imitable, relatable, and sympathetic to her audience). When Olibrius' soldiers first approach her, she does not come to them haughtily spitting insults but falls to her knees and prays that God have mercy on her. As Olibrius first subjects her to torture, Margaret pleads:

Consider me, Lord, and have pity, and liberate me from the hands of my enemies and from the hand of that vile tormentor, otherwise my heart might be stricken with fear. Instead send dew from heaven, in order that my wounds might be soothed, my pain might be eased, and my sorrow might be turned to joy.³⁶

As the torture continues, Margaret prays for confidence and aid so that she can stand against her oppressors. Although Margaret shows astounding resilience in the face of adversity, her prayers give her

away: she is worried and in pain, and although she weathers the beatings she receives, she fears that she will succumb, just as those reading her story could or might have already.

Conclusion

Heffernan said that saints “share collectively in the luminous life of the incarnate Christ. In sum, sanctity is derived from the sacred, which is radically singular.”³⁷ The Paris version reflects this notion of radical singularity in its intertextual borrowing of figures and patterns from *The Life of St. Anthony* and Gregory’s *Dialogues*. This borrowing highlights the monastic quality of Margaret’s narrative. Like the desert father Anthony or Gregory’s errant monks, Margaret is subject to trials and temptations that she may or may not overcome.

By using the dragon as a symbol of this temptation – and being swallowed by the dragon as a sign of succumbing to temptation as seen in Gregory’s *Dialogues* – the narratives provide a context in which Margaret is tempted from her path as a virgin martyr toward the pleasures of this world. While these temptations could take a variety of forms, the appearance of and explanation by the black demon – a debt which Margaret owes to St. Anthony’s *Life* – indicates that the dragon embodies a sexual temptation that Margaret faces.

At the same time, this creates an odd “doubling” effect. Margaret “succumbs” to the dragon in that she is eventually consumed by the creature. However, she also bursts from his belly unscathed, seemingly negating the equivalence of swallowing/succumbing at the same time. This allows Margaret’s audience to read her *Life* in two ways. In the first, Margaret is overcome by the dragon and consumed, succumbing to sexual temptation. In the second, Margaret’s eruption from the dragon signals her defeat of the temptation the dragon represents, leaving her whole and sound in both body and virginity. In my next chapter, I suggest that this doubling is what allows Margaret to serve in what seems a paradoxical function: as both an exemplar to virgins and an aid to pregnant women.

Notes

- 1 Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 103.
- 2 For example, when Aviad Kleinberg contends that Jacobus de Voragine’s rejection of the draconic swallowing in the Latin *Legenda Aurea* version of the *Life* emerges from the contact Margaret makes with “earthly, phallic forces of passion and the body” (*Flesh Made Word: Saints’ Stories and the Western Imagination* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008], 276).

- 3 Kathryn Gravdal writes that the dragon of the 10th-century Latin *Passio Sancte Margarete* represents “a discourse of sexual violence” and that the swallowing of Margaret by the dragon is a symbolic rape which displaces the sexual violence of the “heathen seducer” (Olibrius) onto the dragon and devil of the narrative (*Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* [Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991], 37).
- 4 Jocelyn Price, writing toward the beginning of this analytic trend, approaches the dragon differently when she writes of the Katherine Group creature: “It is perhaps worth noting at the outset, that however much classical associations inform a virgin-dragon encounter for us, this is very much a medieval dragon: the eroticism of the Perseus-Andromeda legend is almost entirely lacking from it” (“The Virgin and the Dragon: The Demonology of Sainte Margarete,” in *Sources and Relations: Studies in Honour of J. E. Cross*, ed. Marie Collins, Jocelyn Price, and Andrew Hamer [Leeds: University of Leeds Press, 1985], 338).
- 5 Maud Burnett McInerney, “Rhetoric, Power, and Integrity in the Passion of the Virgin Martyr,” in *Menacing Virgins*, ed. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (London: Associated University Press, 1999), 53.
- 6 McInerney, “Rhetoric, Power and Integrity,” 65.
- 7 For example, Price’s article draws a comparison between the Perseus-Andromeda myth and Margaret’s dragon, while Gravdal is primarily interested in the differences between how male hagiographers (in this case, Wace) and female hagiographers (Hrotsvitha) portray scenarios of rape.
- 8 The notion of intertext is largely credited to Julia Kristeva in her work *Séméiotiké: Recherches Pour Une Sémanalyse* (Collections Tel Quel; Paris: LeSeuil, 1969) (translated into English in Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1980]). For more on the use of intertext in Medieval and Renaissance studies, see for instance Judith H. Anderson, *Reading the Allegorical Intertext: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); Marilyn Desmond, *Christine De Pizan: Texts/Intertexts/Contexts* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Hannibal Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Norris J. Lacy, *Text and Intertext in Medieval Arthurian Literature* (New York; London: Routledge, 2012).
- 9 The Greek and Latin versions of the *Life of St. Anthony* were published as part of Jacques-Paul Migne’s massive *Patrologia Graecae* and *Patrologia Latina*. While scholarly interest in the Greek *Life* has been relatively persistent (resulting in G.J.M. Bartelink’s critical edition of the text in *Vie d’Antoine* [Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1994]), the Latin *Life* has largely languished leading this study to use Migne’s original editions as the source for the Latin text of the *Life* (Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia Cursus Completus*, vol. 73, *Patrologia Latina* [Paris, 1859]: hereafter PL 73).
- 10 See especially the work of David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); “Ethiopian Demons: Male Sexuality, the Black-Skinned Other, and the Monastic Self,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10, no. 3/4 (July 1, 2001): 501–535; and “The Making of Monastic Demonology: Three Ascetic Teachers on Withdrawal and Resistance,” *Church History* 70, no. 1 (March 1, 2001): 19–48.
- 11 Athanasius writes in his prologue to the monks: “You demanded from me that I write to you concerning the way of life of the Blessed Anthony ... so that you might emulate him and practice his example” (*exegistis a me ut vobis scriberem de conversatione beati Antonii ... ut ad ejus aemulationem atque exemplum vos instituere possitis*, PL 73:125–126; All translations are my own in this book unless otherwise noted).

- 12 Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 193.
- 13 Benjamin Putnam Kurtz, *From St. Antony to St. Guthlac: A Study in Biography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1926). Kurtz's work also suggests the depth to which Anthony's narrative had penetrated England even as early as the 8th century.
- 14 Joan M. Petersen, *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great in Their Late Antique Cultural Background* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), esp. Chapter 2.
- 15 Schaff and Wace, *Athanasius*, 193.
- 16 "Postremo cum nec hoc argumento destruere posset Antonium draco teterrimus, et videret se semper ab eius cogitationibus repelli, secundum quod scriptum est, stridens dentibus et ejulans, qualis est, talis merito apparebat et vultu: puer horridus atque niger, ad eius se genua provolvens, humana voce flebat, dicens: Multos seduxi, plurimos decepi; nunc autem ut a caeteris sanctis, ita et tuo sum labore superatus. Quem cum interrogaret Antonius quisnam esset, qui talia loqueretur, ait: Ego sum fornicationis amicus, ego multimoda adversum omnes adolescentes turpitudinis arma suscepi; hinc et spiritus fornicationis vocor. Quantos pudice vivere disponentes fefelli! quot tenuiter incipientes, ad sordes pristinas redire persuasi! Ego sum, propter quem propheta lapsos increpat, dicens: Spiritu fornicationis seducti estis, et revera per me et illi fuerant supplantati. Ego sum qui te ipsum saepe tentavi, et semper repulsus sum. Cum hoc Christi miles audisset, gratias agens Deo, et largiore adversum inimicum confortatus audacia, ait: Multum ergo despicabilis, multumque contemptibilis es; nam et obscuritas tua et aetas infirmarum signa sunt rerum. Nulla mihi jam de te cura est. Dominus mihi adjutor est, et ego exultabo super inimicos meos. Et statim, ad vocem cantantis, phantasma quod videbatur, evanuit" (PL 73:130).
- 17 This use of a black-skinned other to externalize sexual desire in a monastic setting is well-noted in David Brakke, "Ethiopian Demons: Male Sexuality, the Black-Skinned Other, and the Monastic Self," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10, no. 3/4 (2001): 501–535.
- 18 An interesting discussion of the function of demons for externalizing what might otherwise be internal dialogue can be found in David Brakke, "Making Public the Monastic Life: Reading the Self in Evagrius Ponticus' Talking Back," in *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*, ed. David Brakke, Michael L. Satlow, and Steven Weitzman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).
- 19 We will see these motifs repeated in Gregory's *Dialogues* in which other members of the monastic community are incapable of seeing the dragons that their suffering brothers claim to be before their very eyes.
- 20 The Latin text for Gregory's *Dialogues* can be found in Adalbert de Vogüé, *Grégoire Le Grand, Dialogues*, vol. 2 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1979).
- 21 Much like the *Life of Anthony*, Gregory's *Dialogues* were enormously successful – something of a medieval "bestseller" – and Werferth, the Bishop of Worcester (c.873–c.912 for office), translated them into Old English for Alfred the Great, attesting to their popularity and importance in England.
- 22 "Qui mox ut monasterium exiit, contra se adsistere aperto ore draconem in itinere inuenit. Cumque eum isdem draco qui apparuerat deorare uellet, coepit ipse tremens et palpitans magnis uocibus clamare, dicens: «Currite, currite, quia draco iste me deorare uult.» Currentes autem fratres draconem minime uiderunt, sed tremement atque palpitantem monachum ad monasterium reducerunt. Qui statim promisit nunquam se esse iam a monasterio recessurum, atque ex hora eadem in sua promissione permansit, quippe qui sancti uiri orationibus contra se adsistere draconem uiderat, quem prius non uidendo sequebatur" (Vogüé, *Dialogues*, 212).

- 23 “Recedite. Ecce draconem ad deuorandum datus sum, qui propter uestram praesentiam deuorare me non potest. Caput meum in suo ore iam absorbit. Date locum, ut non me amplius cruciet, sed faciat quod facturus est. Si ei ad deuorandum datus sum, quare propter uos moras patior?» Tunc fratres coeperunt ei dicere: «Quid est quod loqueris, frater? Signum tibi sanctae crucis imprime.» Respondebat ille cum magnis clamoribus, dicens: «Volo me signare, sed non possum, quia squamis huius draconis premor.» Cumque hoc fratres audirent, prostrati in terra cum lacrimis coeperunt pro ereptione illius uehementius orare. Et ecce subito coepit aeger cum magnis uocibus clamare, dicens: «Gratias Deo. Ecce draco, qui me ad deuorandum acceperat, fugit. Orationibus uestris expulsus est, stare non potuit. Pro peccatis meis modo intercedite, quia conuerti paratus sum et saecularem uitam funditus relinquere» (Vogüé, *Dialogues*, 140–142).
- 24 “«Quando me uobiscum ieiunare credebatis, occulte comedebam. Et nunc ecce ad deuorandum draconem sum traditus, qui cauda sua mea genua pedesque conligauit, caput uero suum intra meum os mittens, spiritum meum ebibens abstrahit.» Quibus dictis statim defunctus est, atque ut paenitendo liberari potuisset a dracone quem uiderat, expectatus non est. Quod nimirum constat quia ad solam utilitatem audientium uiderit, qui eum hostem cui traditus fuerat et innotuit et non euasit” (Vogüé, *Dialogues*, 146).
- 25 While we may not necessarily see such responsibilities and pleasures in the same light as the more obvious carnal appetites of gluttony and lust, the whole reason that the eremite extricates himself from the day-to-day world is to avoid the temptations that the devil may use to seduce a holy man. For further examples of the demonic temptations that plague the monk, see Cassian’s eight dangerous spirits in his *De institutis coenobiorum* (Boniface Ramsey, ed., *John Cassian: The Institutes* [New York: Newman Press, 2000]).
- 26 At first blush, it seems that the dragon is present to scare the monk back to his abbey. While this is certainly the narrative operation of the dragon, it makes little sense that a demonic creature would have such a goal in mind. Rather, the dragon is present along the path, the path that leads away from the abbey. Its mouth is stretched wide, and the monk shouts in fear that the dragon may devour him. This sequence of events indicates that had the monk not happened to see the dragon – as the other monks did not – he would have invisibly walked into the dragon’s mouth while visibly walking away from the abbey. In other words, the dragon was lying in wait not to intentionally frighten the monk back to the abbey, but to swallow up its due when the monk strayed away down an improper path. The dragon is the visual symbol of the monk’s invisible temptation to worldly pleasures.
- 27 “videam inimicum meum qui mecum pugnat” (Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 202).
- 28 “Ecce subito de angulo carceris exiebat draco horribilis totus uariis coloribus deauratus capilli et barba eius aurea. Videbantur eius ut ferrum acutissimum dentes. Oculi eius uelut flamma ignis splendebant, et de naribus eius ignis et fumus exiebat, et lingua eius anhelabat super collum eius, et gladius utraque parte acutus in manu eius uidebatur. Erat enim terribilis et foetum faciebat in carcerem ab ipso igne qui exiebat de ore draconis. Sancta autem Margareta facta est ut herba pallida et formido mortis cecidit in eam et confringebantur omnia ossa eius ... draco aperto ore posuit os suum super caput beate Margaretae et expandit linguam suam super calcaneum eius et degluttiiuit eam in uentrem suum. Sed crux Christi, quam fecerat sibi beata Margareta, ipsa creuit in ore <draconis et in duas partes eum diuisit. Beata autem Margareta exiuit de utero> draconis nullum dolorem in se habens” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 204–206).

- 29 “aspiciebat in sinistram partem carceris et ecce uidit alium diabolum sedentem ut homo niger habens manus suas ad genua conligatas. Et surrexit et coepit ambulare ad eam et tenuit manum eius. Dixit autem Margareta ad demonem, ‘Sufficiat tibi quod fecisti. Cessa iam de me. Multa enim mala perpetrasti.’ Demon respondit, ‘Ego quidem fratrem meum Rufonem misi in similitudinem draconis ut orbsorberet te et tolleret memoriam tuam de terra. Te uero eum interfecisti cum signaculo Christi. Nunc autem per orationem tuam et me interficere cupis?’ Tunc sancta Margareta uirgo conprehendit daemonem per capillos, delisit eum in terram, et posuit pedem suum dextrum super ceruicem eius, et dicebat ei, ‘Cessa iam, maligne, de mea uirginitate’” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 206).
- 30 “‘Ego sum qui multorum labores abstuli. Ego sum qui pugno cum iustis et incendio renes eorum et abceco oculos eorum et facio eos obliuiscere omnem caelestem sapientem. Et cum dormierint uenio super eos et excito illos a somno ad mala opera, et quos non possum mouere de somno facio eos in somno peccare. Quacumque arte uentilo quos sine signaculo crucis Christi inueni <et> contra eos pugnare atque eis nocere non cesso. Illos uero quos cum signaculo sancte crucis signatos inuenio et qui tibi sunt similes confusus et uacuuus ab eis discedo quemadmodum a te hodie. O beata Margareta, quid dicam? Superatus sum a te. Quid faciam ignoro. Arma mea confracta sunt, uirtus mea confusa est, a tenera puella superatus sum’” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 208).
- 31 “Magis autem consente mihi et adhora deos meos, et multam tibi dabo pecuniam et bene tibi erit super omnem familiam meam ... Si non adoraueris deos meos, gladius meus deuorabit carnem tuam et ossa tua disperdam super ignem ardentem. Nam etsi obedieris mihi et adoraueris deos meos at corpus tuum copularis mihi in amorem, ecce ante omnes tibi dico, ego accipiam te ad coniugium et bene tibi erit sicut et mihi” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 198).
- 32 McInerney, “Rhetoric, Power, and Integrity,” 62–63.
- 33 McInerney, “Rhetoric, Power, and Integrity,” 66–68.
- 34 “Cui imperator: reconde, oro, quod moneo, in corde tuo et noli dubiis respondere sermonibus; non te quasi famulam possidere cupimus, sed regina poteus et electa decore in regno meo triumphabis. Cui uirgo: attende et tu, obsecro, et iudicii examine ueridica sanctione decerue, quem magis eligere debeo, an potentam, aeternum, gloriosum et decorum vel infirmum, mortalem, ignobilem et deformem. Tunc imperator indignatus ait: e duobus unum tibi elige, aut sacrificia, ut uivas aut exquisita tormenta subi, ut pereas. Et illa: quaecumque tormenta potes cogitare, ne differas, quia carnem et sanguinem meum Christo offerre desidero, sicut et ipse pro me se ipsum obtulit; ipse enim Deus meus, amator meus, pastor et sponsus unicus meus. Tunc quidam praefectus furenti regi suauit, ut intra triduum quatuor rotas serris ferreis et clavis acutissimis circumseptas praepararet, ut eam tam horribile tormentum dissecaret et caeteros christianos tam dirae mortis exemplum terreret” (Iacobus De Voragine, *Legenda Aurea: Vulgo Historia Lombardica Dicta*, ed. Johann Georg Théodor Graesse [Osnabrück: Zeller, 1965], 793).
- 35 “Mane autem facto iussit praeses afferri eam et intuens, quoa illata tormenta nusquam comparuerunt, dicit ei: ecce quomodo repropitiatus es tibi tuo Dii et diligunt te, quia plagas tuas sauauerunt. Respondit Barbara: similes sunt tibi Dii tui surdi, caeci et muti. Et quomodo plagas meas curare potuerunt, qui sibi ipsis remedium conferre non possunt? Ille autem, qui curauit, est Christus filius Dei uivi, quem tu non uides, quia induratum est cor tuum a dyabolo. Tunc praeses, ut leo fremens, iussit ei lampades ardentes applicari ad latera et malleo caput iis caedi, ipsa autem intuita in coelum dixit: tu nosti, cognitor domine, quia amoris tui occasione patior, me ergo ne derelinquas” (Iacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 900).
- 36 “Respice in me, Domine, et miserere mei, et libera me de manibus inimicorum meorum et de manu istius carnificis, ne forte percussum formidet cor meum. Sed

mitte rorem de caelo ut mitigentur plagae meae, et dolor meus requiescat, et tristitia mea uertetur in gaudium" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 200).

- 37 Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 7.

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2 In the belly of the beast

Sexual surrender and resistance in the *Life*

This “doubling” effect allows Margaret’s female readers significant latitude in interpreting her *Life*. By alternatively reading Margaret as succumbing to temptation or destroying it, Margaret’s maternal and virginal adherents were able to use the same narrative to perform widely different *imitationes* of the saint. On the one hand, Margaret’s maternal adherents were able to understand Margaret as a saint who had been subject and succumbed to sexual desires, sexual desires with which they themselves were very familiar. On the other, Margaret’s virginal adherents were able to read Margaret as a saint who had been tested by sexual temptation and successfully extinguished her desires, as they themselves hoped to do.

In order to elaborate on this duality further, in this chapter I engage Catherine Sanok’s concept of an “imagined audience”¹ to analyze two texts: the Paris version and the Katherine Group version. This imagined audience can be defined as the audience that the redactor believed would consume the text; the audience for whom the redactor was writing. This may include the actual audience of the text, but might also include a wider extended audience. For instance, Margaret’s prayers in the Paris version address an imagined audience of maternal adherents when Margaret prays:

I pray further Lord that he who erects a basilica in my name or who prepares a book of my passion through his own labor, fill him with your Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth, and in that house let an infant not be born deaf nor blind nor mute.²

Regardless of whether the Paris version actually reached any expectant mothers or fathers, Margaret’s prayers are clearly directed at them, indicating that the redactor imagined future parents among either his³ immediate audience or those who might generally consume the *Life*. Similarly, the narrator of the Katherine Group Margaret identifies his imagined audience as “all that have ears and hearing”: widows, wedded and especially virgins.⁴ While it may be that women in one or more of these sex roles never would have consumed the Katherine Group version, the redactor clearly considered the salubrious message that Margaret offers to be relevant to all women (but most especially to virgins).

I also make use of certain facets of monster studies⁵ in my interpretation of the Paris and Katherine Group versions of Margaret's *Life* in order to make sense of their widely different intentions when dealing with the same scene. Broadly, I interpret the dragon as the sexual experience, a boundary that Margaret has vowed not to cross as a Christian virgin. In the Paris version, Margaret is overwhelmed by a decidedly masculine dragon whose description is replete with sexual innuendo, suggesting that although Margaret emerges victorious from her battle, it may not be that she emerges entirely untouched by her opponent. The monster beckons at the same time that it repels.⁶ In this way, Margaret becomes emblematic of the same succumbing in maternal audiences: women who crossed the same sexual boundaries and now seek Margaret's aid during the difficult process of labor.

By contrast, the redactor of the Katherine Group Margaret rejects this flirtation with sexuality. With the dragon of the Mombritius clearly in mind, the redactor of the Katherine Group version signals specifically to his audience that Margaret has emerged not only physically unharmed but with virginity intact. While the dragon of the Paris version attracts, the Katherine Group Margaret uses the dragon to solidify sexual boundaries. I show how these sexual boundaries could be developed further by incorporating another text contained in the Katherine Group, *Hali Meiðhad*, into my analysis. Through a comparison of the two texts, I show that one was meant to accompany the other: as a duo that laid out a method of retaining one's virginity (*Hali Meiðhad*) and narrativized that same method of retention for *imitatio* (Katherine Group version).

In both cases, the redactors generate narrative spaces for their imagined audiences to occupy, thereby enhancing the audience's connectedness to Margaret and their capacity for *imitatio*. In the Paris version, Theotimus artificially injects himself into the narrative, moving from external recorder to internal observer. Similarly, the redactor of the Katherine Group version places a group of nameless women at Margaret's prison window to quake in fear with Margaret at the sight of her dragon.

Maternal succumbing: the Paris version

In the Paris version, I focus my analysis on the mothers who might have found solace in Margaret's aid (real and/or imagined).⁷ To begin, I return to the description of the dragon. Carole Hill has noted – regarding an Old English version of the *Life* – that the description of the dragon “makes it difficult for the reader to see the horror so much as to feel the overwhelming of the physical senses.”⁸ The Paris version's description is much the same, and the reader is overcome by

the vivid portrayal of the dragon at the same time that Margaret is overcome by the beast itself:

Behold: suddenly from the corner of the prison came a horrible dragon completely gilded with various colors of hair and with a golden beard. Its teeth were like the sharpest iron. Its eyes shone like a flame of fire, it blew flame and smoke from its nostrils, its tongue was panting over its neck, and it seemed as if a two-edged sword was in its hands. For it was terrible and made a stench in the prison from the same fire which issued from its mouth. And St. Margaret became as pale as grass and the fear of death came upon her and all her bones were shattered ... The dragon opened its mouth and placed it over the head of the blessed Margaret and extended its tongue over her heel and swallowed her into its stomach. But Christ's cross, which the blessed Margaret had made over herself, expanded in the mouth of the dragon and split it in two parts. Then, blessed Margaret came out of the dragon's belly without any injury to her.⁹

Margaret's dragon is a feast for the senses: the audience is invited to see the colors, feel the heat of the flame, and smell the stench of its breath. Furthermore, this invitation is extended not only by the text but also by the internal narrator, Theotimus. At the beginning of the Paris version, Theotimus describes himself as someone who purchased accounts of Margaret's *Life* and other documents in order to compile his tale.¹⁰ Thus, Theotimus comes to the *Life* after it is finished: he is a literary spectator just like other medieval readers. Yet, prior to the prison scene we read: "Theotimus and her [Margaret's] foster-mother appeared in the prison and gave her bread and water. And he watched through the window and wrote her prayers."¹¹ "Appeared," indeed! Abruptly, the narrator – who was previously just a literary spectator – is suddenly present at Margaret's struggle with the dragon.

This sudden presence accomplishes two things. First, it emphasizes the importance of the scene to Margaret's *Life*. The only other place that Theotimus inserts himself into the narrative is to retrieve Margaret's relics, the remnants of her body that will tie her presence to the earth.¹² Second, it invites the audience to participate. Just like Theotimus, they come to Margaret's *Life* after Margaret's death; yet, the presence of Theotimus suggests that – at the very least – the prison scene is not 4th-century Antioch but *hoc tempus*: anyone at any time anywhere can be a spectator. The narrator underscores this universal time with the declaration "Behold" (*ecce*), drawing the audience into the scene as they experience what happened to Margaret with their own senses. Thus, the audience is not only invited to watch the dragon, but to be overcome by it in much the same way that Margaret is.

And overcome she is. Margaret does not stand tall before the

dragon, but rather pales at its appearance and collapses onto the floor. As suggested in [Chapter 1](#), rendering Margaret as a human figure rather than a supernaturally fortified one creates a sympathetic connection between Margaret and her reader: readers can identify with Margaret's fear, pain, and joy rather than holding her up as an unattainable ideal.

The dragon's appearance is also a valuable component of this *imitatio*. When read closely, the dragon's form is not so much draconic as frighteningly masculine, a hybrid of man and beast: it – or perhaps, he – is hairy, sports a beard, and grasps “something like” (*videbatur*) a sword in both hands as it bears down on Margaret.¹³ Panting (with lust? exertion?) the creature extends its lascivious tongue and swallows Margaret whole. It is here that Margaret – as Kleinberg has asserted – comes in contact with “something carnal.”¹⁴

It is this carnality to which Margaret briefly succumbs. As we have already seen in Gregory's *Dialogues* in [Chapter 1](#), a successful swallowing by a dragon suggests that the victim has given in to the urges the dragon represents: the secret glutton to his gluttony and the unwilling monk to the lures of the world. Even when the dragon fails to consume his intended victim – as in the case of the monk leaving Benedict's abbey, the threat of swallowing is made explicit (as with the same monk's cries to his fellows) and it is only by turning back (and thus, *not* succumbing to temptation) that one avoids filling the hungry dragon's belly.

Within the allegory suggested by the narrative, Margaret succumbs, much as her maternal readers succumbed to the same desires and became pregnant as a result. Yet, in this shared identity there must have been hope, for unlike the glutton of Gregory's *Dialogues* this is not Margaret's end. Rather, the sign of the cross expands powerfully in the dragon's stomach and Margaret emerges *de utero* without injury.

This is a form of *imitatio* that likely would have drawn the imagined audience of mothers to the dragon scene. Although one might first suppose that the dragon is the maternal figure (being that it bears Margaret from its *uterus*), to suggest that medieval women somehow identified with the dragon is both unflattering and creates an expectation for a birth with grisly results. Instead, I suggest that this identification functioned in much the same way as exemplarity functions in Sanok's *Her Life Historical*. In brief, Sanok argues that women who performed *imitationes* of saints were not necessarily seeking to repeat the exact events of the Lives, but rather to understand a facet of their own life as an abstraction of a particular saint's *Life*. For instance, Julian of Norwich's *imitatio* of St. Cecilia did not involve taking three blows to the neck from a sharp sword, but rather to understand these three literal wounds as three figurative

ones: contrition, compassion, and desire for God.¹⁵

In the same way, mothers were invited to look on St. Margaret not as a figure with whom to directly identify and imitate, but rather as an exemplar for their current “predicament.” As I have suggested before, the context supplied by the hybrid narrative depicts Margaret as a woman much like them: someone who had succumbed to sexual temptation. As a result, she is frightened and fears for her life, not unlike women facing the always dangerous and frequently lethal process of childbirth in the Middle Ages. Yet, miraculously Margaret does not die; rather, she emerges from the results of succumbing to her sexual temptation “without any injury.” In this way, Margaret served as an exemplar of a painless and productive birth process, experiencing metaphorically what the redactor imagined his feminine audience would hope to experience literally.

Virginal resistance: the Katherine Group version

Yet, mothers were neither the only readers of St. Margaret’s *Life* nor the only individuals interested in carrying out an *imitatio*. I will now shift gears and address the way in which virgins read the *Life of St. Margaret* as a source of spiritual strength for *resisting* sexual temptation.

While all of Margaret’s *Lives* had the capacity to speak to virgins, the text that is arguably most focused upon a virginal audience is *Seinte Margarete* from the Katherine Group. The Katherine Group (a title referring to the five works in Bodley 34: the three saints lives *Seinte Katerine*, *Seinte Margarete*, *Seinte Iuliene*; an exhortation to the virginal life entitled *Hali Meidhad*; and a work on the custody of the soul called *Sawles Warde*) has a history of significant scholarly work that surrounds it, dating back over a century.¹⁶ One focus of such scholarship has been identifying the audience of the Katherine Group, and opinions have ranged from recluses¹⁷ to the inhabitants of a nunnery¹⁸ to women practicing domestic monasticism.¹⁹ Many of these arguments are compelling, and I hope to illuminate them further by focusing upon the audience which the redactor of the Katherine Group version intended to address in this chapter and the next.

The Katherine Group version makes clear from the beginning that it is especially interested in its virginal audience. We read in the introduction:

All that have ears and hearing, listen: widows with the wedded, and let the maidens especially listen to how they should love the living Lord, and live in virginity, the virtue he loves the most, so that they may, through that blessed maiden we that we remember today with the honor of virginity, sing that blessed maiden’s song with this

maiden and with the heavenly host eternally in Heaven.²⁰

While the text calls out widows and the married as part of its audience (suggesting that the redactor expected an audience that was not only virgins), it nevertheless places special emphasis on the meaning of Margaret to a virginal audience and the special place that virgins hold in heaven. Moreover, it also makes clear that the redactor had virgins and their identification in mind when he wrote the text.

These differences in the redactor's intentions are reflected in the differences between the appearance of the dragon in the Katherine Group version and the Paris version.²¹ As in the Paris version, Margaret is subjected to various tortures prior to her draconic visitation. Locked in her prison cell she prays to God to show her true opponent:

Her foster-mother was the one who cared for her, and came to the dungeon and brought her food, the bread and spring water that kept her alive. Then she and many more were watching through a window as she prayed when suddenly, out of a corner, there came towards her a demon from hell in the shape of a dragon, so dreadful that they were horrified at the sight of that evil monster, glistening all over as if he had been gilded. His hair and long beard glittered with gold, and his grisly teeth were like black iron. His eyes shone brighter than stars or gemstones broad as basins in his horned head on either half of his high hooked nose. Out of his revolting mouth, flames were flickering, and from his nostrils billowed smothering smoke, a smoke most foul, and he lashed out his tongue, so long he could swing it around his neck; and it seemed as if a sharp sword shot from his mouth that flashed like lightning and blazed with fire; and it happened that the place was filled with a strong and foul stench, and the shadow of the demon flickered and shone over all. He stretched himself and strode toward the meek maiden, and his jaws gaped threateningly above her and started to stretch and crane his neck as if he were about to swallow her whole. If she was afraid of that horrible fiend, it is little wonder! ... And then she drew down her body, then across, the beloved sign of that dear cross on which he rested. And the dragon rushed at her in that same moment and set his hideous mouth, immensely huge, high above her head, and stretched out his tongue to the soles of her feet and swung her in, swallowing her into his great womb – but to Christ's honor and his own ruin. For the sign of the cross that she was armed with quickly set her free, and became his swift death, as his body burst in two in the middle; and the blessed maiden, inviolate, without a mark on her, walked out of his womb, praising aloud her Savior in heaven.²²

The differences between the depiction of the dragon in the Katherine Group version and the Paris version are telling. Unlike the vaguely

lustful and man-like dragon of the Paris version, the Katherine Group version features a dragon you can really sink your teeth into (and vice versa): vicious teeth, luminescent eyes, a horned head, and an enormous mouth preparing to swallow Margaret whole. Moreover, the redactor does not clinically describe a progression of events as in the Mombritius (“the dragon opened its mouth *and* placed it over the head of the blessed Margaret *and* extended its tongue over her heel *and* swallowed her into its stomach”), but invites the audience to experience Margaret’s terror as it slowly advances on her, opening its jaws with deliberation until it rushes at Margaret and tosses her into its mouth. Certainly, the same sensual quality that pervades the Paris version is present in the Katherine Group version but with a different goal: this is not a dragon that seduces but one that terrifies. In fact, the redactor even gives the audience permission to feel such terror by calling attention to Margaret’s own: “if she was afraid of that horrible fiend, it is little wonder!”

As in the Paris version, this emotional resonance in the Katherine Group version – fear rather than sensuality – is enhanced through an invitation for the audience to participate. Whereas Theotimus slyly inserts himself outside the window of Margaret’s prison and invites his readers to do the same, the redactor of the Katherine Group version envisions a community of women fearfully watching Margaret’s travails:

Her foster-mother was the one who cared for her, and came to the dungeon and brought her food, the bread and spring water that kept her alive. Then she and *many more* were watching through a window as she prayed.²³

Who are the “many more” who attend the nursemaid and watch Margaret in her encounter? They are the women²⁴ of the community to whom the redactor of the Katherine Group version envisioned writing. At the most crucial point of the narrative, the redactor brings a nameless group of women to the window of the prison so that they may be “horried at the sight” just as Margaret is.

As it turns out, Margaret has little to fear from such a “horror:” just as she did in the Paris version, Margaret emerges from the dragon “involute, without a mark on her.” Yet, this emergence is not precisely the same as in the Paris version. In the Paris version, Margaret emerges from the dragon “without any injury to her (*nullum dolorem in se habens*);” in the Katherine Group version, she emerges “involute, without a mark on her (*unmerret, wiðuten eawereuch wem*).” This double assertion of Margaret’s safety is noticeable when compared with the Paris version, where just one reassurance of Margaret’s unwounded state is required.

However, it is precisely because “involute (*unmerret*)” is not

describing a physical state of health that the redactor of the Katherine Group version includes it. The word is instead indicating the state of Margaret's virginity, just as it did in Margaret's prayer prior to the dragon's appearance: "For one thing, I beseech you, forever and overall, that you protect my virginity inviolate (*unmerret*) for you."²⁵ Through the repetition of *unmerret*, the redactor is confirming that Margaret's prayer was answered: despite being (literally) consumed by sexual temptation "personified," Margaret has resisted it and remained uncorrupted. Unlike the Paris version, this redactor is making it perfectly clear to his audience that Margaret is still virginal and did not succumb to the sexual temptation represented by the dragon, despite being swallowed.²⁶

This is especially important for a virginal audience, because the demon, "a good deal blacker than any black man,"²⁷ that follows (and who, as we have seen in the Paris version, explains the silent dragon's role) is even more explicit about the dragon's role as a sexual tempter: "You have defeated my brother most terribly and slain the most cunning devil in Hell, whom I sent to devour you in the form of a dragon and attack with his great might the virtue of your virginity."²⁸ As in the Paris version and the *Life of St. Anthony*, the foul creature then recounts its ways to Margaret,²⁹ weeps over how its weapons (the same word used by Anthony's Spirit of Fornication) have been overcome, and expresses his shame at being defeated.³⁰

Instruction in imitation: the Katherine Group version and *Hali Meiðhad*

This pattern of attack and shame is also identified by *Hali Meiðhad* (another text enclosed in the Katherine Group), which warns:

If you reply in this way to the desire of your flesh and to the fiend's temptation, he will flee from you in shame; and if he makes any stand at all after this, and still afflicts your flesh and provokes your heart, then your Lord God is allowing him so as to increase your reward ... For then the Devil is shamefully defeated by his own strategy, since – as the Apostle says – you will not be crowned unless you are assailed. If God wishes to crown you, he will certainly let the Evil One attack you so that you may thereby earn a victor's crown. Therefore it is best for you when he grieves you most and battles you more fiercely with his temptations.³¹

Much like the audience of the Katherine Group version, the audience of *Hali Meiðhad* is cautioned that they will be tempted by demonic figures that are intent upon violating their virginity. This temptation will take the form of weapons – in this case, arrows – directed at the

virgin, who should remain steadfast as God would only allow such testing if she were to be crowned.

Given these similarities between the Katherine Group version and *Hali Meiðhad*, I advance a relationship between the two works. While I am not necessarily suggesting that the authors of the two texts are one and the same, the similarities (some that appear very deliberate) between the two suggest they were both meant to be read together. Specifically, I argue that *Hali Meiðhad* was read as an instructional text for achieving the status of St. Margaret.³² That is, virginal women would read the Katherine Group version and recognize Margaret as an exemplar of the state to which they aspired (i.e., virginal bride of Christ) and would then turn to *Hali Meiðhad* as an instruction manual on how to achieve this state. Alternatively, this reading may have been inverted, making the Katherine Group version something of a proof text of *Hali Meiðhad*: after reading *Hali Meiðhad*, which detailed a specific way of approaching the maintenance of virginity, virgins would then read the Katherine Group version and see the same techniques and concerns parroted back to them in the actions of Margaret and the speech of the demon.

To begin this comparison, I focus on *Hali Meiðhad*'s warning to virgins. After discussing the wretched state of women who choose to forgo their virginity, the author begins to describe the way in which the devil might cause them to fall:

Now the old fiend looks around, and sees that you stand so high in this virtue, like her and her son, like an angel in heaven, in the honor of virginity, and swells with rage; and night and day he shoots his arrows, drenched in a venomous potion, towards your heart to wound you with weak will and make you fall, which Christ forbid! And always the more steadfastly you stand against him, the more savagely he attacks out of spite and anger; because it seems to him more shameful to be overcome, that something as weak as flesh is, and moreover a woman's, able to prevail over him. Every carnal desire and lecherous lust which arises in your heart is the Devil's arrow; but it cannot wound you unless it is lodged in you and remains long enough that you wish your desire could be brought to fruition.³³

Margaret's story reaches like a ghost through the pages of *Hali Meiðhad*. The author of *Hali Meiðhad* discusses an ancient enemy (kin to the devil in Margaret's cell, no doubt) who is so infuriated by virginity that he constantly shoots arrows (while the word here is *earewen*, these are very much a form of *arma* as used in Margaret's *Life*) at his opponents. These arrows are clearly meant to incite sexual desire because they are dipped in a "venomous potion" (*attri healewi*) meant to cause virgins to fall from their state of grace. This "potion" appears to be a collection of sexual thoughts or suggestions because

such arrows are tipped in “every carnal impulse and lecherous desire.” The only cure for such arrows is to be aware and for the sufferer to pluck them from her heart quickly since they can only wound if the poison is allowed to fester. Finally, when this devil fails he suffers great shame because – like Margaret’s demon – he cannot bear to be overcome by a woman of all things!

While these are common narrative elements of many of the *Lives*, the Katherine Group version also contains more specific and deliberate links between itself and *Hali Meiðhad*. In the Katherine Group version, after Margaret has beaten the black demon it tells her:

After Beelzebub, I have been the destroyer of the most men, and devoured their labors, and caused the rewards they had built for themselves for many years to fade away through some of my wiles – rewards which I wrenched down when they least expected it – and not yet was anyone able to overcome me but you now ... I am forever going busily about the good, and those I follow most diligently are the ones who are trying to be pure without the desire for men and who flee carnal filth, to see if I might make any way for them to fall and defile themselves. Many I have overthrown that truly thought they could escape my wiles, and in this way: I sometimes allow a chaste man to remain near a chaste woman, at whom I throw nothing nor attack, but let everything happen of its own accord. I let them talk about God and discuss things of goodness, and truly love each other without sexual desire or wicked thoughts, so that each is confident in themselves and the other, and they feel more secure sitting by themselves and jest³⁴ with each other. Then through this safety, I make my first attack on them, and shoot very secretly and – before they realize it – wound their unwary hearts with a very venomous potion. Lightly at first, then with loving looks, with one gazing intently at the other, and then I incite them to more through flirtation until they are romping and wrestling together. Then I drive amorous thoughts into them – at first against their will, but then they grow to tolerate it such that it seems good. And so I, when they let me, neither stopping me nor preventing themselves nor standing strong against it, I lead them into the mire and the loathsome lake of that filthy sin.³⁵

Considering that the Katherine Group version is based on the Mombritius tradition of Margaret, it is not surprising to see that many of the same features discussed in the previous paragraph are present in this version. What is surprising is the degree to which this scene reflects the language of *Hali Meiðhad*, something which the Mombritius exemplar of Margaret under consideration (the Paris version) most certainly does not. Rather than address all sexual activity, the Katherine Group demon admits to a special hatred of virgins: “those I follow most diligently are the ones who are able to be

pure without the desire for men and who flee carnal filth, to see if I might make any way for them to fall and defile themselves.” He further claims to incite carnal desire by “shooting” his targets with the same venomous potion (*attri healewi*) found in *Hali Meiðhad*. Perhaps most interesting is the extended example that the demon gives of luring virgins into carnal filthiness. According to the creature, he allows two chaste individuals to remain near to each other and engage in discussion of their mutual love of God. Then, very secretly he wounds their hearts with an arrow dipped in his “venomous potion.” Due to the comfort that they feel in each other’s presence, they neglect to pluck it out and as the arrow and potion festers in their hearts, they are spurred to greater and greater acts of physical intimacy until finally the virgin falls.

Of course, this is an elaboration of the previously discussed warning that *Hali Meiðhad* offers to its imagined audience of virginal readers: the Katherine Group version simply outlines a scenario which might occur to bring about the fall of a virgin. Moreover, it outlines a *likely* scenario: regardless of the type of community to which such virginal readers would have belonged (anchoritic to domestic monasticism), contact with at least a male confessor would have been required. This contact between a chaste man (theoretically, the confessor) and a chaste woman (the virginal reader) is precisely what the Katherine Group version warns against. In short, the Katherine Group version offers a likely story of the fall of a virgin, while *Hali Meiðhad* uses the same narrative elements (the arrow, the venomous potion, and the festering) to provide its warning.

Read together, *Hali Meiðhad* and the Katherine Group version create a powerful *imitatio* for avoiding sexual temptation. In the Katherine Group version, Margaret successfully overcomes the sexual temptation represented by the dragon and emerges from its belly *unmerret*. To her virginal readers, this becomes the metaphorical *imitatio*: to emerge from sexual temptation without being sullied by it. As with Margaret’s maternal readers, Margaret’s virginal readers were not searching for dragons to swallow them in direct imitation of Margaret’s *Life*, but rather they sought to overcome sexual temptation as Margaret allegorically did. The emergence of the black demon lays out the demonic impediments to this *imitatio*, detailing the way in which demons may attempt to seduce them into sexual acts. Realizing that in order to carry out their *imitatio* they must defeat such demonic adversaries, the Katherine Group version’s virginal readers would then turn to *Hali Meiðhad*, in which they would encounter familiar language and scenarios from the Katherine Group version that would guide their identification process.

In this way, the Katherine Group version narrativizes the elements

of attack, temptation, and resistance in which *Hali Meiðhad* personally instructs the virginal reader. In doing so, the Katherine Group version establishes the figure to be imitated, but *Hali Meiðhad* directs this *imitatio* in a specific way. By offering strategies and reasons for maintaining virginity, *Hali Meiðhad* shapes the way in which virgins reading both texts would have identified with St. Margaret, understood sexual temptation, and even conceived of their own virginity. At the same time, during this focused identification the virgin is again urged to continue her *imitatio* of the saint:

Think of St. Catherine, of St. Margaret, St. Agnes, St. Juliana, St. Lucy, and St. Cecilia, and of the other holy virgins in heaven, how they not only forsook the sons of kings and lords with all worldly wealth and earthly pleasures, but suffered cruel pains rather than accept them, and a painful death in the end. Think how happy they are now and therefore how blissful they are in the arms of God, as queens of heaven.³⁶

Through this *imitatio* of the Margaret narrative – guided by the instructions in *Hali Meiðhad* – the imagined audience did not acquire a distant, sanctified role model, but a companion in their ongoing struggle with sexual temptation, a sister with whom they would one day “sing that blessed virgins’ song together.”

Conclusion

This temptation is not static, and the two narratives in question handle Margaret’s temptation in fundamentally different ways. In the Paris version, whose redactor imagines an audience of mothers, the dragon completes its seduction of Margaret. The redactor depicts Margaret facing a dragon with distinctly masculine traits and invokes sensual language that invites the audience to experience what Margaret is experiencing. This invitation to experience as Margaret did is embodied by the character of Theotimus, who – just like the readers of *Margaret’s Life* – lived after the time of Margaret’s narrative but was still nonetheless present at her prison window. Swallowed into the dragon’s “womb,” Margaret is then expelled from her grisly *faux* birth miraculously unharmed, as unharmed as the maternal audience imagined by the redactor hoped to emerge from their own labors.

On the other hand, the redactor of the Katherine Group version writes to an imagined audience of all women but prizes virgins above others. Continuing to engage the senses of the reader but rejecting the traditional, sexualized dragon of the Mombritius, the redactor concocts a terrifying dragon meant to warn his imagined charges away from any sexual temptation. Although Margaret is swallowed

and emerges from the dragon's "womb" – as she did in the Paris version – she emerges "inviolated," her virginity secured against succumbing to temptation through her prayers to Christ. Furthermore, the black demon – no doubt speaking in the voice of the redactor – warns Margaret's listeners about how it causes virgins to succumb to sexual desire and provides them with the means to defeat its wiles.

Despite these differences, both narratives lend immediacy to their *imitationes* by grounding the draconic visitation not in 4th-century Antioch but in the instant and location that the reader encounters the scene. The presence of Theotimus in the Paris version and the group of unidentified women in the Katherine Group version both serve to invite the audience to experience Margaret's draconic encounter as if they were present at her prison window. Both presences beckon the audience to participate in Margaret's narrative as if they were there, and in so doing they render the *imitatio* that Margaret's adherents performed a contemporary *imitatio* for contemporary concerns. In a similar fashion, *Hali Meidhad* universalizes Margaret's experience into a plan for its virginal adherents, rendering Margaret's narrative timeless in a similar fashion. By echoing elements of Margaret's narrative, *Hali Meidhad's imitatio* becomes Margaret's own, detailing a way to actualize the elements of the narrative for the virginal reader.

Of course, the narrative of the draconic visitation allows both virgins and mothers to benefit from either version under consideration. For instance, virgins were not the only beneficiaries of the Katherine Group version. The redactor specifically addresses the *Life* to wives and widows, as well as virgins. Moreover, while the analyzed section from the Katherine Group version had special importance to the virginal component of the audience, the wives and widows of the audience likely profited from it as well. For instance, Margaret's encounter with the dragon is the source of her blessing for parturient mothers. Thus, the virgins of the Katherine Group version's audience read the encounter with the dragon in one way, expectant mothers read it in another. The section would have spoken differently to both demographics of the audience but ultimately was capable of addressing the interests of both groups.

However, Margaret's blessing for parturient women clearly does not. While Margaret's actual encounter with the dragon is applicable to both groups, when Margaret prays "in the house where a woman lies in labor, as soon as she remembers my name and my suffering, Lord, quickly help her and listen to her prayer"³⁷ this clearly excludes virgins. That is, although the redactor addresses the entire *Life* to wives, widows, and virgins, it is only the mothers who stand to benefit from this particular section of the *Life*. This separation is nothing more than a curiosity in most *Lives*, but in others – such as the Katherine

Group version and CCC version – there is enough substance from which to meaningfully derive audience participation, the focus of my next chapter.

Notes

- 1 Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
- 2 “*Adhuc peto, Domine, et qui basilicam in nomine meo fecerit, uel qui de suo labore comparauit codicem passionis mee, reple illum Spiritu Sancto tuo, spiritu ueritatis, et in domo illius non nascatur infans claudus aut cecus neque mutus*” (Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 214).
- 3 I use the pronoun “he/his” to refer to redactors throughout this work since men were most frequently the redactors of Margaret’s tale.
- 4 “*Hercneð, alle þe earen ant herunge habbeð, widewen wið þa iweddede, ant te meidnes nomeliche lusten swiðe ʒeornliche hu ha schulen luuien þe liuiende Lauerd*” (Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1990], 44).
- 5 First laid out in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
- 6 The sense of “beckoning” performed by the monster is persistently present in much of the literature in monster theory, but also difficult to point to directly in the theses of individual works. Rather, there are contributions to the field in which this element is easier to see than in others. See David A. Hedrich Hirsch, “Liberty, Equality, Monstrosity: Revolutionizing the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Sarah Alison Miller, “Monstrous Sexuality: Variations on the Vagina Dentata,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012); and Debbie Felton, “Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012). Though not necessarily related to monster studies, Juliette Dor, “The Sheela-Na-Gig: An Incongruous Sign of Sexual Purity?” in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Sarah Salih, Anke Bernau, and Ruth Evans (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 33–55, examines the eponymous grotesques as figures that are meant to both sexually repel and fascinate.
- 7 Margaret’s explicit blessings to expectant mothers were rather limited at the time of the Paris version’s redaction, see [Chapter 5](#).
- 8 Carole Hill, *Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2010), 62.
- 9 “*Ecce subito de angulo carceris exiebat draco horribilis totus uariis coloribus deauratus capilli et barba eius aurea. Videbantur eius ut ferrum acutissimum dentes. Oculi eius uelut flamma ignis splendebant, et de naribus eius ignis et fumus exiebat, et lingua eius anhelabat super collum eius, et gladius utraque parte acutus in manu eius uidebatur. Erat enim terribilis et foetum faciebat in carcerem ab ipso igne qui exiebat de ore draconis. Sancta autem Margareta facta est ut herba pallida et formido mortis*

cecidit in eam et confringebantur omnia ossa eius ... draco aperto ore posuit os suum super caput beate Margaretae et expandit linguam suam super calcaneum eius et deglutiuit eam in uentre suum. Sed crux Christi, quam fecerat sibi beata Margareta, ipsa creuit in ore <draconis et in duas partes eum diuisit. Beata autem Margareta exiuit de utero> draconis nullum dolorem in se habens” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 204–206).

- 10 “*Ego secundum meam uirtutem dedi pretium et cartas comparaui hab eis qui in illo tempore scriptores erant et scripsi in libris cartaneis omnia quae passa sit beatissima Margareta*” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 194).
- 11 “*Theotimus apparuit in carcere <et> nutrix eius et ministrabant ei panem et aquam. Aspiciebatque per fenestram et orationes eius scribebat*” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 204).
- 12 And even in this scene, his claim to authority is “I am the one who ministered to her in prison with bread and water (*Ego enim eram qui ministrabam ei in carcere panem et aquam*)” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 216).
- 13 It bears mention that “gladius” was a commonly used double-entendre for the penis. See J.N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London: Duckworth, 1982), esp. 19–22, for the frequent use of weapons in sexual innuendo in Latin prose and poetry.
- 14 Aviad Kleinberg, *Flesh Made Word: Saints’ Stories and the Western Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 276.
- 15 Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, 4.
- 16 See Bella Millett, *Ancrene Wisse, the Katherine Group, and the Wooing Group* (Cambridge and Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1996), an annotated bibliography of some 480 sources which pertain to the Katherine Group and the literature that is often associated with it (*Ancrene Wisse* and the Wooing Group).
- 17 Largely due to the possible association of *Ancrene Wisse* – which is directed specifically at anchoresses – and the Katherine Group. An association is frequently imagined between the two groups particularly because *Ancrene Wisse* references “eower engliche boc of seinte Margarete.”
- 18 See Theodor Wolpers, *Die Englische Heiligenlegende Des Mittelalters: Eine Formengeschichte Des Legendenerzählens von Der Spätantiken Lateinischen Tradition Bis Zur Mitte Des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1964).
- 19 See Julie Bond Hassel, *Choosing Not to Marry: Women and Autonomy in the Katherine Group* (New York: Routledge, 2002), esp. [Chapter 2](#). The Katherine Group version, its audience, and previous scholarship will be addressed in more depth in my third chapter.
- 20 “Hercneð, alle þe earen ant herunge habbeð, widewen wið þa iweddede, ant te meidnes nomeliche lusten swiðe ȝeornliche hu ha schulen luuien þe liuiende Lauerd ant libben i meiðhad, þet him his mihte leouest, swa þet ha moten, þurh þet eadie meiden þe we munneð todei wið meiðhades menske, þet seli meidnes song singen wið þis meiden ant wið þet heouenliche hird echeliche in heouene” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 44).
- 21 Francis May Mack was the first to point out that the Katherine Group version is an “adaptation of the Mombritius version” (Frances May Mack, *Seinte Marherete Be Meiden Ant Martyr; Re-Edited from Ms. Bodley 34, Oxford, and Ms. Royal 17a Xxvii, British Museum*, 193 [London: Oxford University Press, 1934], xxiv).
- 22 “Hire uostermoder wes an þet frourede hire, ant com to þe cwalmsus ant brohte hire to fode bred ant burnes drunch, þet ha bi liuede. Heo þa ant monie ma biheolden þurh an eilþurl as ha bed hire beoden; ant com ut of an hurne hihendliche towart hire an unwiht of helle on ane ant drakes liche, se grislich þet ham gras wið þet sehen þet unselhðe, glistinde as þah he al ouerguld were.

His lockes ant his longe berd blikeden al of golde, ant his grisliche teð smenden of swart irn. His twa ehnen stearden steapre þen þe steoren ant ten ȝimstanes, brade ase bascins in his ihurnde heaued on eiðer half on his heh hokede nease. Of his speatewile muð sperclede fur ut, ant of his nease-þurles þreste smorðrinde smoke, smeche forcuðest; ant lahte ut his tunge, se long þet he swong hire abuten his swire; ant semde as þah a scharp sweord of his muð scheate, þe glistnede ase gleam deð ant leitede al o leie; ant al warð þet stude ful of strong ant of stearc stench, ant of þes schucke schadewe schimmede ant schan al. He strachte him ant stured toward tis meoke meiden, ant geapede wið his genow upon hire ungeinliche, ant bigon to crahien ant crenge wið swire, as þe þe hire walde forswolhe mid alle. Ȝef ha agrisen wes of þet grisliche gra, nes na muche wonder!... Ant droh þa endelong hire, ant þwertouer þrefter, þe deorewurðe taken of þe deore rode þet he on reste. Ant te drake reasde to hire mit tet ilke, ant sette his sariliche muð, ant unmeaðlich muchel, on heh on hire heaued, ant rahte ut his tunge to þe ile of hire helen ant swengde hire in ant forswelth into his wide wombe – ah Criste to wurðmund ant him to wraðer heale. For þe rode-taken redliche arudde hire þet ha wes wið iwepnet, ant warð his bone sone, swa þet his bodi tobearst omidhepes otwa; ant þet eadi meiden allunge unmerret, wiðuten eauereuch wem, wende ut of his wombe, heriende on heh hire Healent in heouene” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 58–60).

- 23 “Hire uostermoder wes an þet frourede hire, ant com to þe cwalms ant brohte hire to fode bred ant burnes drunch, þet ha bi liuede. Heo þa ant monie ma biheolden þurh an eilþurl as ha bed hire beoden” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 58).
- 24 Since the antecedent of “many more” (*monie ma*) is the feminine noun *heo*, it seems likely that this group is composed of women.
- 25 “For an þing I biseche þe eauer ant oueral, þet tu wite to þe mi meiðhad unmerret” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 58).
- 26 One might also note that – considering the Mombritius version is the source for the Katherine Group version – this is further support for the reading that Margaret succumbed to sexual desire in the Paris version. That is, if there was never any threat of Margaret succumbing to sexual desire in the Mombritius version, then there would be no need for the author to qualify for his audience that Margaret remained “inviolatē” the condition would be assumed.
- 27 “muche deale blackre þen eauer eani blamon” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 60).
- 28 “þu hauest grimliche ibroht mi broðer to grunde ant islein þen sleheste deouel of helle, þe Ich o drake liche sende to forswolhe þe ant merren i wið his muchele mein þe mihte of þi meiðhad” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women*, 62).
- 29 Focusing on sexual themes that I will discuss later in this chapter.
- 30 “Ȝet were hit þurh a mon – ah is þurh a meiden!” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 70).
- 31 “Ȝef þu þus ontswerest to þi licomes lust ant to þe feondes fondunge, he schal fleo þe wið scheome; ant Ȝef he alles efter þis inohreaðe etsonde, ant halt on to eili þi flesch ant prokie þin heorte, þi Lauerd Godd hit þeueð him to muchli þi mede ... For þenne is þe deofel wið his ahne turn scheomeliche awarpen, hwen þu, as þe apostle seið, he schalt beon icrunet bute þu beo asailet. Ȝef Godd wule cruni þe, he wule leote ful wel þe unwiht asaile þe, þet tu earni þerþurh kempene crune” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 42).
- 32 Although it does seem to me that one text was written with the other in mind, which came first is unclear.

- 33 “Nu bihalt te alde feond, ant sið þe i þis mihte stonde se hehe, ilych hire ant hire sune, as engel in heouene, i meiðhades menske, ant toswelleð of grome; ant scheoteð niht ant dei his earewen, idrencte of an attri healewi, towart tin heorte to wundi þe wið wac wil, ant makien to fallen, as Crist te forbeode! Ant eauer se þu strengeluker stondeð aȝein him, se he o teone ant o grome wodeluker weorreð; for swa muche þe hokerluker him þuncheð to beon ouercumen, þet þing se feble as flesch is, ant nomeliche of wummon, schal him ouerstihen. Euch fleschlich wil ant lust of leccherie þe ariseð i þe heorte is þes feondes fla; ah hit ne wundeð þe nawt bute hit festni in þe, ant leaue se longe þet tu waldest þet ti wil were ibroht to werke” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 12).
- 34 The word *gomenin* (*gamen*) can also be used euphemistically to indicate intercourse of a nonverbal nature as well. Likely, the pun reinforces the sexual danger virgins place themselves in through what may appear at first to be simple games.
- 35 “Ich habbe efter Belzebub meast monnes bone ibeon, ant forswolhen hare swinc, ant to aswinden imaket þe meden þet ha moni ȝer hefden ham iȝarket wið sum of mine wiheles, þet Ich wrencte ham adun hwen ha lest wenden; ne neauer ȝet ne mahte me ouercume na mon bute þu nuþe ... þe gode Ich ga aa bisiliche abuten, ant ham Ich folhi neodelukest þe cunnið to beon cleane wiðuten monnes man ant fleoð flesches fulðen, ȝef Ich mahte eanies weis makien ham to fallen ant fulen hamseoluen. Monie Ich habbe awarpen þe wenden mine wiheles ful witerliche etwrenchen, ant of þisse wise. Ich leote oðerhwiles a cleane mon wunien neh a cleane wummon, þet Ich nawiht towart ham ne warpe ne ne weorri, ah leote ham al iwurðen. Ich leote ham talkin of Godd ant teuelin of godlec, ant trewliche luuien ham wiðuten uuel wilnunge ant alle unwreste willes, þet eiðer of his ahne, ant of þe oðres ba, treowliche beo trusti, ant te sikerure beon to sitten bi hamseoluen ant gomenin togederes. Þenne þurh þis sikerlec seche Ich earst upon ham, ant scheote swiðe dearnliche ant wundi, ear ha witen hit, wið swiðe attri healewi hare unwarre heorte. Lihtliche on alre earest, wið luueliche lates, wið steape bihaldunge eiðer on oðer; ant wið plohe-speche sputte to mare, se longe þet ha toggid ant tollid togederes. Þenne þudde Ich in ham luuefule þohtes – on earest hare unðonkes, ah swa waxeð þet wa þurh þet ha hit þeauieð þet ham þuncheð god þrof. Ant Ich þus, hwen ha leoteð me, ne ne letteð me nawt ne ne steorið hamseolf ne ne stondeð strongliche aȝein, leade ham i þe leiuen ant i þe ladliche lake of þet suti sunne” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 64–66).
- 36 “Þench o Seinte Katerine, o Seinte Margarete, Seinte Enneis, Seinte Iuliene, Seinte Lucie, and Seinte Cecille, ant o þe oþre hali meidnes in heouene, hu ha nawt ane ne forsoken kinges sunes ant eorles, wið alle worldliche weolen ant eorðliche wunnen, ah þoleden stronge pinen ear ha walden neomen ham, ant derf deað on ende. Þench hu wel ham is nu, ant hu ha blissið þeruore bituhe Godes earmes, cwenes of heouene” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 40).
- 37 “I þet hus þer wummon pineð o childe, sone se ha munneð mi nome ant mi pine, Lauerd, hihendliche help hire and her hire bene” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 78).

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3 The devil made me do it

Audience partitioning and the *Life of St. Margaret*

While the *imitatio* of the draconic visitation was used to inform the sexual identities of both mothers and virgins, Margaret's narrative could also be used to inform the identities of other groups as well. Maud Burnett McNerney has argued that *Seinte Margarete* was used as a model of empowered feminine speech by medieval women,¹ Carolyn Kinane has shown that the same redactor used the *Life* to "shape the anchorite's interior, spiritual life and also to define her as intercessor, as link between the earthly community that supports and reveres her and the heavenly kingdom with which she communes."² Regarding the version of the *Life* contained in BL Cotton Tiberius A.iii, Tracey-Anne Cooper notes its capacity to assist in lay instruction by acting as a "prime example of the good Christian life and the fully formed Christian conscience" and that through the *Life* "the laity were exhorted to behave in their ordinary lives in the same manner that Margaret had behaved in her extraordinary *Life*."³ Sarah Salih has argued that Margery of Kempe made use of the narrative elements of Margaret's *Life* – and the *Lives* of other virgin martyrs – in order to forge a virginal identity for herself.⁴

In a broader sense, these scholars are all speaking to a similar issue: the fact that Margaret's narrative served as a guide for her readers to practice proper lifestyle and behavior. Regardless of whether the reader was a religious professional (e.g., an anchoress or monk) or a member of the laity, Margaret's *Life* offered valuable advice for acceptable behavior and interactions and served as a role model for the ideal Christian life. By imitating Margaret, Margaret's readers were guided toward a socially acceptable Christian identity.

One portion of Margaret's *Life* that is particularly fertile ground for such instruction is her encounter with the black demon. In the Mombritius tradition, the demon frequently claims to be responsible for coercing Christians into a variety of different sexual sins. By associating specific sexual practices with the influence of demons, the narrative implicitly warns its readers to reject such practices as a part of their Christian sexual identity. At the same time, this creates a powerful didactic tool for redactors of the *Life*: by targeting specific sexual behaviors in the demon's speech, redactors were able to

cultivate or condemn specific sexual behaviors in their audience.

On occasion, redactors single out a specific portion of their imagined audience in the black demon's speech to such a degree that this portion of the audience can be isolated from the larger imagined audience. In versions of the *Life* where this phenomenon occurs, the black demon's speech becomes an even more telling indicator of the sexual identities of the targeted portion of the audience. I have chosen to call this phenomenon "audience partitioning" and the isolated portion of the audience a "partition."

By way of a brief example, the Katherine Group redactor addresses a broad imagined audience of "all that have ears and hearing": widows, wedded and especially virgins.⁵ While the vast majority of the text is relevant to the entire imagined audience, it is possible for the redactor to speak specifically to the concerns of one particular portion of the imagined audience (let's say, the "maidens" of the imagined audience of the "widows, married, and maidens"). For instance, when the black demon begins to talk about the means to defend one's virginity from outside influences, this is clearly an irrelevant concern to the widows and mothers (who have already lost their virginity) but is of primary concern to the virginal readers. Since the redactor is speaking directly to an isolated segment of the larger audience (the partition of virgins), these sections of the *Lives* become an important source of data regarding the sexual identity of the virgins who imitated the Katherine Group Margaret, allowing the close reader to emerge with valuable historical cultural insights about the audience's makeup.

There are three versions of Margaret's *Life* that I would like to address in which audience partitions yield valuable historical data. In the first section, I will address the Paris version and the monastic influences on the text. As I have previously argued, the Mombritius tradition has been significantly influenced by monastic texts such as *The Life of St. Anthony* and Gregory the Great's *Life of St. Benedict*. In this chapter, I argue further that – despite the stated audience of "men, women, virgins"⁶ – the Paris version itself betrays this influence by addressing issues of importance to a group of male monastics in the black demon's speech.

My second section focuses upon the audience partition in the Katherine Group version. In the beginning, the redactor identifies his general audience as composed of "all that have ears and hearing, widows with the wedded, and maidens especially."⁷ In "The Audience of the Saints' Lives of the Katherine Group," Bella Millett argues that, despite this internal address to an audience of maidens, widows, and virgins, the audience of *Ancrene Wisse* must have found *Seinte Margarete* useful based upon the Katherine Group's shared presence in

manuscripts. Building on this research, I will argue that the black demon's speech is clearly preoccupied with the proper ways in which virgins are to conduct themselves in sexually threatening situations, suggesting that the redactor is addressing the virginal community among his general audience of widows, wives, and virgins. A further analysis of the contents of this portion of the *Life* reveals that the virgins to whom the black demon's speech pertained must have been either the same community as that in *Ancrene Wisse* or a very similar one.

In the third, I turn my attention to Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 to address Elaine Treharne's argument that the original audience of the *Life of St. Margaret* contained therein is "monastic and ascetic."⁸ While I believe that Treharne is correct in her assertion that the CCC version is especially suited for such an audience, I will argue that the black demon's speech – once more – betrays another distinct audience partition. My analysis (particularly of the demon's claim that he causes men to have sexual relations with four-footed beasts) suggests that the version of the *Life* was originally written for two audiences: one that was "monastic and ascetic" and another a rural, lay audience that fell under the monastic audience's pastoral care.

Monastic masturbation: the Paris version

As argued in the two previous chapters, there is an essential monastic character to the Mombritius version of Margaret's *Life*. In the Paris version under consideration, one finds the black demon from *The Life of St. Anthony* and a "Gregorian" dragon ready to swallow Margaret. Although both the *Life of St. Anthony* and Gregory's *Life of St. Benedict* were not read exclusively by monks, one might expect to find a text that speaks specifically to such communities given the indebtedness shown.

However, this assumption seems to be somewhat foiled by the initial address that Theotimus gives to his readers. In the beginning of the *Life*, the narrator exhorts his intended audience to "listen with your heart and understand: men, women, [and] virgins imagine yourself as tender girls in your hearts."⁹ Given such a wording, the text seems to be directed at all members of the Christian fold.

Yet, the black demon's speech appears to be directed at a much more specific audience. After Margaret encounters the dragon, the black demon appears and discusses his role in sexual sins: I am he who snatched away the labors of many. I am he who fights with the just and inflames their kidneys and blinds their eyes and makes them forget all heavenly wisdom. And when they are asleep I come over them and wake them from sleep to wicked works, and

those I am unable to move from sleep I cause to sin in their sleep. By whatever art possible I inspire [to lust] those I find without the sign of Christ's Cross and I never cease to fight against them or do them harm. But those whom I find sealed with the sign of the cross and who are similar to you, I leave confused and empty-handed, just as I do from you today. O blessed Margaret, what can I say? I have been overcome by you. I do not know what I am to do! All my arms have been destroyed, my strength is confounded, and I am overcome by a tender girl.¹⁰

In this alternately self-congratulatory and self-effacing speech, the demon reveals several items of interest to a monastic audience. As I discussed in previous chapters, the similarity of language in the demon's speech and its appearance correlate with the spirit of fornication that threatens the fortitude of those "devoted to living in chastity." It claims that its "arms" have been destroyed by Margaret, an analogous term to the "arms of baseness" that Anthony destroys through his devotion. Similarly, the claim that the demon has "snatched away the labors of many" is cognate with the spirit of fornication's claim that despite having destroyed the efforts of many that it was overcome by Anthony's "labor." Thus, it is likely that when the demon claims he fights "with the just" that he is referring to the same population that Anthony's "spirit of fornication" does: those devoted to living in chastity and engaged in a monastic path.

This conclusion is further supported by the particular sexual sins to which the demon refers. Though the demon's second sentence seems somewhat innocuous at first, the kidneys were frequently viewed as either a necessary part of the route that must be covered by seminal fluid during ejaculation or as playing some part in production of semen.¹¹ Thus, the notion of the demon inflaming the kidneys is no doubt tied to the sexual nature previously discussed: it seeks to excite the organs associated with semen, thereby causing arousal. In fact, Cassian advises his monastic audience in the *Institutes* to "cover the locations of the kidneys with lead sheets, by which the power of the metal applied to the generative members will be able to inhibit the obscene humours" (i.e., nocturnal emission).¹²

Clearly, the demon and Cassian are in agreement: in the next line, the creature claims that he comes upon his victims in their sleep and either rouses them to "wicked works" or causes them to "sin in their sleep." Once more, these claims track with the interests of a monastic audience. While at first blush masturbation and nocturnal emission might seem to be concerns for a general Christian audience, in practice these sins were primarily monastic anxieties. "Unlike the Victorians, who worried about the debilitating effect of masturbation on boys, medieval writers, at least outside the monastery, do not seem

to have been as concerned about it.”¹³

Moreover, these anxieties are typically couched in narratives or discourses that blame demons for the impulses behind such sins. In Cassian’s *Conferences*, Serenus responds to Germanus regarding the power of evil spirits:

There is no doubt that unclean spirits can assault the properties of our thoughts, but by inferring them from external sensible information, that is, either from our dispositions or from our words and pursuits in which they perceive us to be inclined more eagerly.... If, suggesting fornication, they sense him [the monk] calmly bearing the libidinous dart, or they see him agitated in the flesh, or at any rate he does not need to sigh at the lasciviousness of an unclean suggestion, then they know the dart of lust is already fixed in the deepest parts of his soul.¹⁴

Caesarius of Heisterbach in his *Dialogus miraculorum* relates a narrative of the devil wandering through the sleeping chamber of the lay brothers of the Cistercians, moving from bed to bed in the shape of a nun and lavishing attention on the sleeping brothers. Similarly, Peter Damian relates a narrative of a demoniac being exorcised by “John of Anso.” As John commands the demon to leave, it says:

Have you forgotten what I did to you last night? If it has not escaped your memory, you will certainly recall that after I had disguised myself as a wild boar of the forest, you pursued me as the hunter is wont to do. But after appearing as a wild boar, I suddenly took the form of a beautiful woman, and running up to give you a kiss that you might pollute yourself, I was gloriously successful.¹⁵

The two phenomena (inadvertent ejaculation and masturbation) could even be conflated together, as in Gerald of Wales’ narrative of a young monk who was assaulted by an evil spirit in prayer. As the monk attempts to pray, “an evil spirit approaches [the young man], places its hands on his genital organs, and does not stop rubbing his body with its own until he is so agitated that he is polluted by an emission of semen.”¹⁶

Finally, the narrative also offers respite from the demon’s advances. After recounting his deeds, the demon claims that it is confounded by “those whom I find sealed with the sign of the cross and who are similar to you.” While “[those] who are similar to you” [*quo tibi sunt similes*] is highly ambiguous, it does not seem out of step with the narrative (neither the broader Paris version as a whole nor the more localized demonic interlude) to assume that those who are similar to Margaret are those who are questing for lives of chastity. Thus, while the demon threatens its monastic audience with sexual sin, a relatively simple and always-at-hand apotropaic is available: search for sexual purity the way Margaret does and cross yourself.

In the end, despite the redactor’s sweeping gesture of audience

inclusiveness, the demon addresses material that would only interest a monastic audience. Lay men and women who had a vested interest in the “perils” of nocturnal emission and masturbation were likely few and far between and finding individuals outside of a religious occupation who were “like Margaret” were likely equally rare at the time of the manuscript’s production. Thus, the black demon’s speech aligns with the monastic elements previously discussed and suggests that while “men, women, and virgins” may all have benefited from the Paris version, monastic men aspiring to live the *vita angelica* were the likely beneficiaries of the black demon’s speech.

In defense of virginity: the Katherine Group version

While the audiences of the Paris version are not a subject of significant scholarly attention, the question of audience that surrounds the Katherine Group (and thus, the Katherine Group version of *St. Margaret*) is. Throughout a significant portion of its scholarly history, the works comprising the Katherine Group (*Hali Meiðhad*, *Sawles Warde*, and the Lives of St. Katherine, Juliana, and Margaret) have been linked to *Ancrene Wisse*,¹⁷ due to their shared presence in manuscripts (e.g., BL Cotton MS Titus D. xviii), linguistic characteristics (discussed in Tolkien’s seminal article on the AB variety of Middle English “*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*” (1929)),¹⁸ themes (virginity and the life of a *sponsa Christi*), and style (alliterative prose and considerable skill in composition).¹⁹

Despite this long-standing association, some scholars are beginning to move away from grouping *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts of the Katherine Group together. Millett and Wogan-Browne point out that the Katherine Group texts are addressed to “a more general audience” than *Ancrene Wisse*: *Hali Meiðhad* could be directed toward an audience of either established virgins or those contemplating virginity; *Sawles Warde* is relevant to all Christian individuals; *Seinte Margarete* is addressed to wives, widows, and virgins; and the *Life* of St. Juliana is addressed to “all lay-people who cannot understand Latin.”²⁰ Julie Hassel even goes so far as to argue that the Katherine Group and *Ancrene Wisse* are “stylistically and thematically ... quite different.”²¹ Rather than treating the two together, Hassel argues that the Katherine Group should be read on its own terms and reaches the conclusion that the Katherine Group’s first audience was a group of women practicing “domestic monasticism,” a form of piety in which women “lead a religious life unmarried, as consecrated virgins, within their own households.”²²

One source of this disparity may be the issue that Bella Millett points out in “The Audience of the Saints’ Lives of the Katherine Group.” In her contribution, Millett argues that there are really two audience groups that must be considered when contemplating the Saints’ Lives of the Katherine Group. On the one hand, there is the audience that the individual narratives claim to be addressing. Two of the three Saints’ Lives in the Katherine Group call attention to audiences of “wives, widows, and virgins” (St. Margaret) and “all lay-people who cannot understand Latin” (St. Juliana). This would run counter to associating either text with an anchoritic audience, instead suggesting a more mixed audience of religious and lay. On the other hand, these same Saints’ Lives are found in manuscript together with *Ancrene Wisse* (BL Cotton MS Titus D. xviii) and *Ancrene Wisse* itself refers to “ower englishe boc of seinte Margarete” which may be a reference to the *Seinte Margarete* of the Katherine Group. Thus, there is evidence to suggest that while the Katherine Group Saints’ Lives may have been written with a broader intended audience, a very specific audience (the same one as *Ancrene Wisse*) found it useful.

I believe that this audience analysis can be taken one step further. By focusing on the audience partitioning within the *Life of St. Margaret*, I will show that a portion of the Katherine Group version (the black demon’s speech) is specifically directed toward an audience of anchoritic women that is similar to, if not the same as, the audience of *Ancrene Wisse*. That is, the text was not of later use to audiences of *Ancrene Wisse*, but rather was written with such a community in mind (possibly even the specific community to which *Ancrene Wisse* was originally directed).

In order to drive this point home, I argue the dissimilarity of the Katherine Group version to the Paris version in my analysis, thereby showing the degree to which the author deviates from his Mombricitus source material. I then continue to show the correspondences between the Katherine Group version and *Hali Meïðhad* as I did in [Chapter 2](#), and finally draw connections between both texts and *Ancrene Wisse* in the final portion of my analysis.

After Margaret defeats the dragon in the Katherine Group version, the demon appears sitting to Margaret’s right in the prison cell. Margaret then enters into an extended prayer, one which seems to cause the demon pain since he pleads with her to stop. Seizing the creature by his hair, she swings him around the prison cell, mercilessly beating him until he is firmly planted underneath her foot. This beating is followed by the demon lamenting Margaret’s deeds and waxing complimentary:

And you, woman, are not at all like other women. It seems to me you shine brighter than the sun, but though all your body blazes with

light, and your fingers seem to me so beautiful and so fair and so blindingly bright, those that you used to bless yourself and to make the sign of the cross that stole my brother from me and to bind me bitterly with baleful bonds. It seems to me that I cannot bear to look at them, that light blazes and flashes so.²³

Margaret responds to this speech by accusing the demon of flattery,²⁴ at which point he continues with his narrative.

Much like the Mombritius source material, the function of this paragraph is to establish the power of the sign of the cross. According to the demon, not only are Margaret's fingers "so dazzling" that he cannot look upon them, but it was the sign of the cross that kills his brother and binds him. In the first case, the dazzling fingers establish a sensory manifestation of an otherwise invisible phenomenon. Much like the stories in which people expressing incredulity at the Eucharist find the host transformed into a finger when it passes their lips,²⁵ the demon confirms with its senses what Christians are meant to believe: that the sign of the cross invokes the power of God. While this power is invisible to human eyes (a state which can present problems for belief), the demon claims to see it, thereby allaying any lingering suspicions of audience members. Furthermore, this invisible power is shown to have real efficacy against demons: according to the demon it is this power which destroyed his brother and bound him to Margaret's will, making it an effective defense against demonic seduction.

While this portion of Margaret's dialogue with the demon seems generally applicable to the entire audience of "wives, widows, and virgins"²⁶ discussed by the author in the opening of the story, the next passage of note, the first pairing of the chaste man and woman, is only relevant to virgins. After Margaret rejects his praise, the demon launches into a lengthy dialogue regarding the individuals whose lives he plagues:

"Alas, lady!" he said then, "I wish I may die if I am not he who makes war at all times against the righteous... I am forever going busily about the good, and those I follow most diligently are the ones who are able to be pure without the desire for men and who flee carnal filth, to see if I might make any way for them to fall and defile themselves. Many have them to fall and defile themselves thought they could escape my wiles, and in this way: I sometimes allow a chaste man, remain near²⁷ a chaste woman, at whom I throw nothing nor attack, but let everything happen of its own accord. I let them talk about God and discuss things of goodness and truly love each other without sexual desire or wicked thoughts, so that each is confident in themselves and the other, and they feel more secure sitting by themselves and jest with each other. Then in the midst of this safety, I

make my first attack on them, and shoot very secretly and – before they realize it – wound their unwary hearts with a venomous potion. Lightly at first, then with loving looks, with one gazing intently at the other, and then I incite them to more through flirtation²⁸ until they are romping and wrestling together. Then I drive amorous thoughts into them – at first against their will, but then they grow to tolerate it such that it seems good. And so I, when they let me, neither stopping me nor preventing themselves nor standing strong against it. I lead them into the mire and the loathsome lake of that filthy sin.”²⁹

One finds in this lengthy report that the fiend claims a special hatred of virgins and a strong desire to see them fall from their privileged position. The demon even goes so far as to describe a specific way in which he has previously caused virgins to lapse: by lulling a chaste man and woman into a seemingly platonic relationship, he eventually causes their friendship to fester into lust through the “venomous potion” which causes their thoughts to turn amorous.

Of course, this is a dramatically different dialogue than the demon offers in the Mombritius source text, despite what appear to be similar audiences (men, women, and virgins compared to wives, widows, and virgins). Gone is the broad original audience, and instead we have the demon describing his attacks upon chaste men and women in significant detail. Clearly, this is of little use to the wives and widows who were originally discussed by the redactor; instead, he or she is creating an audience partition that speaks only to the virgins.

Furthermore, as I pointed out in [Chapter 2](#), there is a clear parallel to this section in *Hali Meidhad*, a fact which strengthens the association between this passage and virgins:

Now the old fiend looks around, and sees that you stand so high in this virtue... and night and day he shoots his arrows, drenched in a venomous potion, towards your heart to wound you with weak will and make you fall, which Christ forbid! And always the more strongly you stand against him, the more furiously he attacks out of spite and anger; because it seems to him more shameful to be overcome, that something as weak as flesh is – and moreover a woman’s – able to prevail over him. Every carnal desire and lecherous lust which arises in your heart is the Devil’s arrow; but it cannot wound you unless it is lodged in you and remains long enough that you wish your desire could be acted on. While your reason resists and restrains your desire, although your lust may incline towards pleasure, it will never harm you nor sully your soul, for reason is her shield under God’s grace. While that shield is whole – that is, the wisdom of your reason – such that it does not break or bend, even though your fleshly desire may be false underneath and would do as it wants the arrows of the devil will all fly back on himself.³⁰

Just as the Katherine Group version does, *Hali Meiðhad* makes use of the venomous arrows that the devil shoots to inspire lust.³¹ However, while these arrows may seek to wound the heart of the virgin, they are incapable of doing so unless they remain lodged in the victim's heart through her own desire to act out the carnal deeds that the venom suggests. Not surprisingly, the previous passage reveals virgins in just such a situation: lowering their defenses due to the chastity of their male companions, they ignore the warning signs of mutual attraction until it is too late. Nevertheless, reason can be used as a shield against these attacks: so long as the "shield of reason" is intact, the virgin is safe from the devil's arrows. Unfortunately, the author of *Hali Meiðhad* says nothing as to how reason can be used by virgins to turn aside these lecherous darts.

That is, until one turns again to the Katherine Group version. Directly after the previously analyzed passage, one finds the following: If they want to resist my despicable deceptions and my treacherous tricks, they must wrestle and grapple with themselves, and they may not cast me down before they overcome themselves. I hate to tell you how best to overcome me, but must do it all the same... These are the weapons that wound me the worst, and guard them unharmed and strengthen them most strongly against me and themselves and their ever-present lusts: Eating in moderation and drinking even more so. Mortifying the flesh in some way and never being idle. The prayers of holy men for them, along with their own, and pious thoughts that they should reflect on during their prayers, to counter the scandalous thoughts that I thrust into them. They should think that it is through me that their lust leads them to work towards wickedness; they should think what a bitter beast they bow to if they submit to me, and whose love they are forsaking; what a precious thing they are losing, that is, the honor of a maiden with their virginity, and the love of the gracious Lord of Heaven and his beloved queen, the lady of angels; how they make themselves vile to all the heavenly host, and dishonor themselves among mortal men, and forsake the love not only of those who are on high in heaven but also those low on earth, and make the angels mourn and us laugh out of much mirth at seeing them fall so low from so very high, from the highest in Heaven to the lowest in Hell. This is what they should often contemplate when alone:

*They should think of sin's blackness, and how filthily it stains;
They should think of heaven and its joys, of hell and its pains;
They should think often how Jesus died, how their own lives slip away,
And the horror and the terror there will be on Judgment Day.*

They should think that the pleasure of that fleshly lust is over very soon, and the punishment for it lasts forever. And as soon as they

commit any kind of sin, they should go at once without delay to reveal it in confession, however little or light the sin might be. For the thing most loathsome to me under the sun is people hurrying often to confess their sins. For I can make that little sin grow enormously if they hide it; but as soon as it is disclosed with remorse in confession, then I am shamed by it, and trembling, I flee from them, ashamed.³² The prescribed use of reason from *Hali Meiðhad* is evident in this passage. One can easily see these commands linked through the common question “is it worth it?” That is, given the loathsome nature of the creature they submit to, the love of Christ that they forsake, the punishment for their sin, and the dishonor they garner for themselves, is the sexual act really worth it? Should all of these questions be difficult to remember prior to the act itself, the author even condenses all of the most threatening thoughts into a four-line, rhyming poem that would have been easy to remember and call upon in times of need (*italics in translation and original language*).³³ At the same time, the passage also offers additional practical methods of warding away lust. These methods include moderation in food and drink, avoiding idleness, mortification of the flesh, and prayer. It is interesting to note that this list could also just as easily be the daily schedule for a monastic or cloistered audience; the demon is reinforcing the necessity of the lifestyle that such women lead to maintain their virginity.

Returning once more to the Mombritius comparison, it becomes clear that this demon is focused on female religious communities in a way that its predecessor never was. Although the demon of the Katherine Group version lists methods of maintaining virginity that could also be used to stave off nocturnal emission in men,³⁴ the gendered language of the passage is clearly targeting women. The demon begins his address to Margaret by stating that he follows most diligently those who try to keep themselves “untouched by men.” This establishes that the “many” being referred to in the next line are the women referred to in the previous, which then places special emphasis upon the woman in the story as the point of identification for the audience. There is no indication that the remaining “theys” in the passage should be interpreted outside this framework; thus, the demon’s speech can be read as “they [the women who remain untouched by men],” a conclusion further supported by periodic reinforcement of this feminine gendering.³⁵

The demon further counsels these chaste women who are unable to fight their lust through these methods to flee the presence of one another:

There is no cure but to flee, so that neither is anywhere alone with the other, nor should they see or meet each other or sit together without a witness who can see what they do and hear what they say. If they do

not stop me at all but tolerate and accept me and still expect to escape, I lead them with false love little by little into such deep dung that they drown therein; and light in them sparks of lust so terrible that they are burned from within and blinded by the blaze, such that they can no longer see themselves.³⁶

As before, the author stresses the threat of temptation, adding a new layer to the previous narrative of the chaste man and woman. In this hypothetical situation, the author acknowledges that if both parties are unable to free themselves from the downward spiral of lust in which they have engaged, their only choice is to flee from one another and ensure that they are never alone. If they fail to do so, then they are surely lost.

This portion of the speech serves to highlight the pragmatic nature of the demon as a whole. The main focus of the Paris version's demon is his activity in stirring masturbation and nocturnal emission and ruining his defeat at Margaret's hands. In contrast, the Katherine Group version's demon is focused upon describing the way in which a virgin should behave in order to avoid the sin of lust: if you want to resist the impulses of your body, practice a lifestyle of moderation; if you happen to have shameful thoughts, think of what you would be giving up if you gave into them; and if none of these work, just run from your desires so that it is impossible to give in to them.

Finally, almost as an afterthought, the demon claims that even when he is defeated by those who stand against him he still manages to "busy myself with them in their beds so that in some way they might sully themselves while sleeping."³⁷ This claim seems to reflect concern over nocturnal orgasm or sexual dreams, warning the reader that such occurrences are not to be taken lightly but rather viewed as the activity of the frustrated demon. Luckily, there is hope for this as well because the "sign of the cross harms me everywhere, and most of all now when it comes from you."³⁸ While it may appear that the presence of nocturnal emission must necessitate a male portion of the partition for the demon to be speaking to, medieval medical principles were not as limiting: women were often seen as inversions of men, allowing many medical practitioners to hypothesize that women ejaculated as men did and therefore could suffer from nocturnal emission.³⁹ Thus, while nocturnal emission was nearly always couched in terms of "masculine embarrassments,"⁴⁰ it cannot be taken as *necessitating* the presence of men in the audience's partition.

Turning to a general overview of the text, it is clear that the demon's speech is directed at a group of women engaging in what is likely an anchoritic lifestyle. The demon is specifically addressing maidens in its speech, it counsels them to maintain their virginity, and lays out a cycle of behavior very similar to a monastic rule.

Moreover, whatever community of virgins that this portion of the Katherine Group version was directed toward was very similar to the audience of *Ancrene Wisse*. Both texts place a high value on the virtue of virginity and chastity,⁴¹ take a dim view of sexuality,⁴² and warn the virgin to be constantly on her guard against temptation.⁴³ Moreover, both texts characterize these threats as the enticements of the devil⁴⁴ and suggest some of the same methods to counter sexual temptation, such as making the sign of the cross⁴⁵ and abstaining from excessive food and drink.⁴⁶

While these similarities could be somewhat anticipated (considering that all three texts arose in roughly the same place and time period), the less common similarities are telling of a potentially deeper relationship. For instance, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* notes that even after enclosure, the virginity of the anchorite continues to be under threat, from both external and internal threats. Externally, the anchorite is potentially threatened by those with whom she interacts. As the writer of *Ancrene Wisse* attests, male religious were a potential source of sexual threat:

Now, here comes a weak man – though he holds himself estimable if he has a wide hood and a closed cloak – and he wants to see some young anchoresses. And he just has to see whether her looks please him, she whose face has not been burnt by the sun – as if he was a stone! And he says she may confidently look upon holy men – yes, someone like him with wide sleeves.⁴⁷

The author goes on to caution the reader against such contact, lest the anchorite inspire lust and be damned as a result:

Yes, my dear sisters, if anyone is eager to see you, never believe good of it, but trust him the less. I would not have it that anyone see you unless he has special leave from your director. For all the three sins I have just spoken about... came about not because the women looked foolishly on men, but because they uncovered themselves in the sight of men, and did things through which they had to fall into sin.⁴⁸

But what if an anchorite chose to receive a seemingly harmless visitor, accidentally admitting a temptation into her cell? While *Ancrene Wisse* does not discuss the possibility in any detail,⁴⁹ a reader could turn to the Katherine Group version's ("ower englische boc of seinte Margarete," perhaps?) story of the chaste man and woman for guidance, which lays out not only specific defensive measures for dealing with such a temptation but also grave warnings about continuing what may yet be a seemingly innocuous relationship to the reader. Furthermore, while *Ancrene Wisse* does not offer a specific scenario of male intrusion, it does warn that an anchoress should not "romp nor play with a man,"⁵⁰ recalling the suggestion that the demon will cause the chaste man and woman to "romp and wrestle"

with one another.

The narrative elements in the story also conspire to make the advice offered by the Katherine Group version, especially compelling and relevant for the anchoress: as Karolyn Kinane suggests in “To Imitate and Inspire Awe,” the transformative elements of the prison scene would have been particularly relevant to an anchoress confined as she was in a cell similar to St. Margaret’s.⁵¹ While Kinane primarily focuses upon the Christ-like elements of this transformation in Margaret’s cell, the prison scene is transformative in a sexual sense as well. In [Chapter 2](#), I suggested that, unlike its predecessor the Mombritius version, the Katherine Group version establishes a narrative in which Margaret’s virginity is tested within her cell but never compromised. This test proves both the purity of Margaret’s virginity and her commitment to its maintenance. After this encounter, Margaret is then visited by the black demon who instructs her in the ways to maintain this commitment. In a similar fashion, virginal anchoresses would descend into their cells, proving their devotion to God by artificially separating themselves from the rest of the community and preserving their virginity, potentially making use of the same techniques that the demon taught Margaret to maintain their own chastity.

Finally, the monastic undertones of both texts would have also served to link their content even further. I noted in my first chapter that the Mombritius version of St. Margaret – upon which the Katherine Group version is based – draws on literature such as the *Life of St. Anthony* and the *Dialogues of Gregory the Great* to create a prison scene in which Margaret is embattled by sexually valent monastic monsters. Similarly, *Ancrene Wisse* argues that – like the desert fathers – the anchorite is in the “wilderness” of her cell and like her predecessors is embattled by the devil and his ilk. Moreover, like the Katherine Group version this battle includes a physical component: just as Margaret mercilessly beat the demon that appeared in her cell, the anchoress of *Ancrene Wisse* is encouraged to think of the sign of the cross as striking, beating, and spitting at the devils who assail her.⁵²

While it cannot necessarily be assumed that the audience which the author addresses in the demonic dialogue of the Katherine Group version and the audience of *Ancrene Wisse* are one and the same, if they are not, the resemblances between the two indicate a remarkably similar community. Similarly, the correspondences between the Katherine Group version and *Hali Meïðhad* are also indicative of a deeper relationship between the two texts, likely that one functioned as a proof text for the other as I suggested in my second chapter. Clearly, all three (the two sections of the Katherine Group and *Ancrene*

Wisse) are directed at an audience of virginal professional religious (or individuals contemplating such a life), while the sections from the Katherine Group version and *Ancrene Wisse* were more specifically directed at an audience of anchoresses that were either identical or nearly identical to one another.

Four-footed beasts: the CCC version

Compared to *Ancrene Wisse* and its associated materials, Cambridge, Corpus, Christi College 303 has only a sparse amount of secondary writings that pertain to its audience. Nevertheless, this scholarship has significantly illuminated the context of the CCC version. The manuscript itself, as described by Clayton and Magennis, is a substantial collection of homilies and saints' lives literature whose content is drawn primarily from Ælfric.⁵³ The manuscript is plain with little ornamentation and was the work of three scribes.⁵⁴ N.R. Ker's *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* places the text in Rochester based on the "prickly" script associated with the location, and the relationship between the CCC version and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 162 (also likely from Rochester) which suggests that the two compilers had access to similar materials.⁵⁵ Mary Richards has suggested that the manuscript dates from the first half of the 12th century.⁵⁶

Regarding the audience for the manuscript, Richards notes that the miscellaneous items of the CCC version include forms of excommunication that call upon Nicholas and Augustine as witnesses. These two saints were of considerable interest to the people of Rochester, the first being the saint associated with an important lay altar at Rochester Cathedral and the second, the founder of the see. Margaret was also of note as the "patron of a local church owned by the priory."⁵⁷ Richards suggests that this is evidence of a continuing need for catechetical materials in Old English through the 12th century at Rochester,⁵⁸ a claim supported by Magennis' research into the affective quality of the CCC version Margaret, a quality that reveals "a purpose of stimulating piety and devotion among an unlearned audience."⁵⁹ Treharne echoes this assertion to some extent, noting that the manuscript continued to have pastoral significance through the 13th and 14th centuries based on the annotations and *nota* in the margins, notes which betray concern over the spiritual wellbeing of the laity in a post-Lateran III (1179) and eventually IV (1215) environment.⁶⁰

The version of Margaret in the CCC manuscript is unique. Clayton and Magennis note that CCC version Margaret is independent from the other extant Old English *Life* to which we have access (London, British

Library, Cotton Tiberius A.iii) and that both represent different strains of a Mombritius/Pre-Mombritius tradition. Moreover (unlike the Tiberius version), many unique discrepancies within CCC version Margaret's narrative make it impossible to determine whether such additions were the work of the Old English author or copied from an unknown version of the Mombritius/Pre-Mombritius *passio* tradition.⁶¹

Treharne's article, "The Sensational '*Life of St. Margaret*,'" seeks to push past the discussion of the CCC version manuscript and instead focus on the original audience of the text. Treharne argues regarding this group:

The Corpus 303 version is especially suited to its twelfth-century audiences because of the emphasis on Margaret's humanity, her self-awareness, her imitative qualities and her sustained activity, even within the enclosed space of imprisonment. The immediate audience for this vernacular *Life* is likely to have been monastic and ascetic, practising daily, to varying degrees, an active emulation of Christ and simultaneously engaging in contemplation of Christ's humanity and the intercessory powers of the Saviour himself, together with his communion of saints. This combination of distinctively twelfth-century spiritual endeavour is highlighted throughout the *Life of St. Margaret*, making this an eminently suitable text for the encouragement of devotion and meditation within a reformed coenobitic environment, such as that at Rochester.⁶²

At the same time, Treharne notes that CCC version Margaret was likely turned toward goals of pastoral care at a later date.⁶³

I agree with Treharne that the original audience of the CCC version Margaret text was likely "monastic and ascetic," and I argue that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that it was also *originally* used for pastoral purposes rather than later being adapted to such purposes.⁶⁴ Thus, there are two groups among the audience this piece was directed toward. The demon's speech in the CCC version once more creates an audience partition, one that addresses a rural lay audience rather than a monastic one.

Like *Seinte Margarete*, the CCC version Margaret focuses some of its attention on sexual sins. However, there is also a much greater range of suffering to which the demon attaches itself:

After Satan was bound, I have since always lived among people and I have turned many of the servants of God away from God, and never was anyone ever able to overcome me except you alone. You slew my brother and you have total power over me, since I see that God is with you. And I will tell you still more of my deeds, one by one. For I seized from mankind, who believe in God, all of their increase:

I deprived some of speech and some of hearing,
some of their feet and some of their hands,

and on account of that they became cripples;
I deprived some of their eyes and some of their senses;
I seduced some who were sleeping and some others while awake;
some by means of wind and some by means of water;
some by means of food and some by drink,
often when they were unblessed;
some with slaughter and some with concord;
some by evil deeds and some by fornicating with the wife of another man;
some with four-footed beasts would commit sin for me and some vexed their
elders with words.⁶⁵

The sins and maladies that the CCC version Margaret chooses to address are rather interesting. The majority of the ailments (blindness, lameness, madness, etc.) are associated with demons and with Jesus' cure of such conditions. For example, in Matthew 12:22, a "demon-possessed" man who is both blind and mute is brought before Jesus who promptly heals him. Similarly, Jesus cures the Gerasene demoniac⁶⁶ afflicted by an unspecified form of madness. Finally, while no demon is explicitly mentioned in the healing of the Capernaum paralytic⁶⁷ or the deaf man in Decapolis,⁶⁸ all of these afflictions (paralysis, muteness, deafness, blindness, and madness) are prevented in children through Margaret's pre-execution prayers in the CCC version.⁶⁹ Since Margaret's power is typically associated with the ability to ward off demonic influence, this pairing suggests that the remaining illnesses were viewed as demonically induced by the author of the CCC version. Treharne notes that sensation is associated with devotion and faith in the story, whereas a lack of sense perception (e.g., deaf and dumb idols and the people who worship them) is associated with demons and false faith. Thus, it seems likely that the author is strengthening this association between a lack of perception (being deprived of hearing, eyes and senses) and the worship of idols by also associating such absences with the demonic.

After the list of afflictions comes the list of sins for which the demon claims responsibility. Once more these sins represent a substantial departure from the sins in the Paris version. First, there is the rather vague "I seduced some who were sleeping and some others while awake." Although this seems to conjure up the threat of nocturnal pollution, masturbation, and illicit sexual activities, this conclusion may be too hasty. The demon's claims are by no means ubiquitously focused on sexuality in the CCC version Margaret as they were in the Katherine Group version or the Paris version, and the vague reference to seduction is significantly displaced from the other two sexual sins in the list. Rather, the list appears to proceed from general to specific: the demon first claims to seduce individuals during the day and night, then with wind and water, and then with progressively narrower descriptions until the reader reaches three very specific sins for which

the demon claims credit (adultery, bestiality, and the disrespect of elders). While all three of these sins – to my knowledge – are unique to this version of Margaret’s *Life*, it is bestiality that is the most interesting and, as I will argue, the most telling.

Bestiality itself is a thorny issue⁷⁰ due to several factors. First, the term does not necessarily have a specific definition in the medieval period (or for that matter, modern times).⁷¹ Early Christian attempts to define bestiality were usually predicated upon the difference between human beings and animals: humans engaged in “bestiality” when they acted as animals did (i.e., had sex as animals do). In this schema, humans were marked by reason, whereas animals were defined by lust.⁷² Sexual congress that was marked by irrationality – or in many cases, any sexual activity – caused one to descend to the level of beasts.⁷³ Finally, humans might commit bestiality when they engaged in intercourse with an animal. The *Summa Theologica* reflects this confusing state of affairs, when Aquinas makes use of the aforementioned valences of the term “bestiality,” in some cases using *bestialitas* to mean “bestial,” in others, human copulation with animals, and in at least one case, the fashion in which animals have sex with each other. To complicate matters further, bestiality was also placed under the category “vices against nature” by Aquinas which also includes under its aegis same-sex sexual acts, masturbation, and sexual acts not given to procreation,⁷⁴ and bestiality was likewise connected to cannibalism “under the notion of bestial desire.”⁷⁵

This slippage between categories was also present outside the *Summa*. For example, the early Western penitentials typically equate bestiality with masturbation, suggesting that the animal was not seen so much as a sexual partner as not present in the act at all.⁷⁶ In the case of legal proscriptions, bestiality could also be lumped together and connected with other “deviant acts” such as copulating with Jews.⁷⁷

Finally, the penitentials proclaimed varied punishments for the act (and thus, varying gravity to the crime) and likely disproportionately mentioned it relative to its occurrence. Thus, there is some difficulty in making use of penitential references to bestiality. As Albrecht Classen notes:

If we were to believe the penitential literature as a benchmark, masturbation, bestiality, sodomy, and lesbianism seem to have been astonishingly common. The authors of the penitentials basically worked as law makers, and we should not naively assume that they were anything but hysterical or extremely sensitive to any potential form of sexual deviation. On the contrary, we can safely claim that already the early Christian Church regularly had to deal with a plethora of sexual practices, interests, tendencies, preferences, and

orientations.⁷⁸

Regarding the penitentials, Pierre Payer suggests that the best methodological approach is to treat the sins listed within them as frequently occurring enough to attract notice.⁷⁹ This suggests that the CCC version was likely directed at an audience who engaged in bestiality enough for it to attract the notice of the author.

While this does not offer much information from which to determine the audience of the CCC version, it may prove more relevant when combined with 20th-century psychological research. However, before approaching such research, something must be said of the difficulties inherent in blending modern psychology with medieval history. In his article “Sex and the Emergence of Sexuality,” Arnold Davidson comments:

We tend to read back our own categories of sexuality into older moral categories, partly because it is often so difficult for us to distinguish them precisely. Blurring the two kinds of categories leads to epistemological and conceptual lack of differentiation... producing anachronisms at best and unintelligibility at worst.⁸⁰

There are several reasons that this anachronism can be avoided in the current study. First, rather than the term bestiality which – I have shown – had considerable valences in the medieval period, the author uses the phrase “*mid feowerfoted nytene for minum willen gefremedon*,” a phrase that might best be translated into vernacular English as “they did ‘it’ with four-footed beasts at my behest.”⁸¹ Ergo, the definition of the act is in the turn of phrase itself: rather than potentially confusing a different valence of “bestiality” the reference is clear: the offenders engage in some form of sexual contact with animals. Furthermore, there is no implication of a community, lifestyle, or any other form of social organization, nor am I interested in attempting to differentiate between acute and chronic practitioners (the latter sometimes termed “zoophiliacs” in modern literature).⁸² Rather, both the study I will be using and the text itself are strictly interested in one thing: whether or not there are individuals who engage in sexual contact with animals.

Those familiar with the psychology of sex will likely have anticipated that I propose to use the Kinsey study. Arguably the first in-depth study of sexual practices, Kinsey et al. performed their interviews in the late 30s to early 60s and two books were published on the results: *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953). Kinsey et al.’s data came under fire for its selection procedures (in particular, a quarter of the original male sample population were prison inmates, another 5% identified themselves as male prostitutes, and sample participants were sometimes recruited by previous participants), and by Maslow and Sakoda for its lack of control in “volunteer bias.”⁸³ Nevertheless, a

similar study by Morton Hunt (*Sexual Behavior in the 1970's*) uncovered similar results to Kinsey et al.'s (at least with respect to bestiality), and Kinsey's data continue to see use in the field. Similarly, it seems safe to assume that despite Maslow and Sakoda's outstanding claim to volunteer bias, this has a more significant impact upon the percentage of individuals in the study who engage in bestiality rather than the geographical data which I intend to use.

Kinsey et al.'s reports concluded that 8% of men, 1.5% of preadolescent females, and 3.6% of post-adolescent females had at least one sexual experience with an animal. However, they also found that such experiences occur much more frequently in rural areas, with a rate of between 40% and 50% in males.⁸⁴ To paraphrase the results and Kinsey's commentary upon them, it is not so much that those living in urban areas are less prone to engage in sexual contact with animals, but that rural areas afford far greater opportunity both in terms of privacy and partners. Morton Hunt's *Sexual Behavior in the 1970's* agrees with these findings, suggesting that lower figures in his own data (roughly 5% of men and 2% of women) were due to increased urbanization and less access to animals and privacy as a result.⁸⁵

Considering this evidence, it seems likely that one portion of the original audience of CCC version Margaret was an audience of rural lay individuals whom the original author felt was in danger of falling into or had previously engaged in the sin of bestiality. Although less certain, this evidence may also suggest that children (esp. a population of young boys) were present in the CCC version's audience. Although adults certainly practice bestiality, Kinsey et al.'s studies found that both men and women typically engage in such behavior in their adolescent years. This practice was particularly common among young boys in rural areas.⁸⁶ Kinsey et al. hypothesized that this was due to the lack of availability of "heterosexual relations with human females."⁸⁷ This conclusion regarding the youth and gender of offenders seems to be reflected in the 17th- and 18th-century bestiality trials in Sweden:

It was the definite opinion of the authorities that bestiality was a boy's game sometimes growing into a man's habit. With this idea confirmed by the confessions of young boys and adult men testifying about their first temptations and attempts in boyhood, often during herding, the court could hardly believe a middle-aged man who claimed that this was the first time for him. In 1686 the Superior Court, Svea Hovratt, complained in a letter to the king about the almost daily reports of bestiality charges. Very often these were said to concern young herdsboys, and the life of herding was described in the letter as a subculture of ignorance and abominable lust.⁸⁸

A younger male audience might also explain why the black demon pairs bestiality and “some vexed their elders with words” together: the assumption that they are both, on some level, “a boy’s game.”

Thus, it must be concluded that there were two audience groups for which the CCC version Margaret was destined. On the one hand, we have the audience that Treharne pointed out: an audience that was “monastic and ascetic, practising daily, to varying degrees, an active emulation of Christ and simultaneously engaging in contemplation of Christ’s humanity and the intercessory powers of the Saviour himself, together with his communion of saints.”⁸⁹ This was likely the audience from which the redactor of the CCC version Margaret was drawn. However, this redactor was also aware of another audience, an audience of rural lay individuals about whom the redactor must have previously heard rumors (or corroborated fact) of the practice of bestiality and chose to address it specifically in his version of the *Life*.

Of course, the fact that a monastic author felt the need to address such an audience in his original narrative suggests that the CCC version Margaret was not first addressed to a monastic audience and then later adapted to a lay audience. Rather, the author wrote with both the monastic and the lay audience in mind, indicating that the CCC version Margaret was always originally intended for pastoral purposes as well as the ascetic contemplation of God.

Conclusion

One of the most striking aspects of both the latter texts is each redactor’s adaptation of the didactic elements of the black demon’s speech from the Mombritius tradition. In the Paris version, the demon warns his listeners that he is the one who inflames their passion and pushes them to sexual sin, a statement that implicitly instructs the audience to remember that their illicit sexual urges are not their own but those of a demon who can be resisted with the power of the cross.

Similarly, CCC version Margaret maintains this didactic warning but sharpens its focus considerably. Gone is the vague threat that the demon “inspires” people to lust. Instead, the redactor targets specific sins (i.e., bestiality, adultery, angering one’s elders), sins so specific that one must assume – *per* Pierre Payer – the redactor had heard they were perpetrated by his audience. Through the mouth of the demon, the redactor instructs those under his pastoral care to reject the behaviors that they have previously engaged in, condemning them as the work of demons.

Conversely, the Katherine Group version’s redactor adopts an opposite approach. Rather than rejecting specific behaviors that must be avoided in the future, the demon lays out a lifestyle that the reader

should follow to avoid falling into sin. From diet to behavior to what thoughts to think, the demon lays out a rigorous anchoritic lifestyle for the reader to follow.

In both of these cases, we can see the outlines of an original community through the statements the demon has made. In the case of the Katherine Group version, a careful analysis shows that the virgins of the “wives, widows and virgins” must have been a community that was incredibly similar to, if not the same as, the community to which *Ancrene Wisse* was directed. In the CCC version, the demon’s speech allows the reader to define a community that had previously been overlooked: a community of rural lay religious practitioners that the monastic author had in mind while he was writing.

In a broader sense, these adaptations would have been an exceptionally effective means of reinforcing or changing the target audience’s behavior. While the author of the Paris version only vaguely hints at the black demon’s area of influence, both the author of *the Katherine Group* and CCC version Margaret are attempting to guide the behavior of a certain portion of their audience by speaking through the demon’s mouth. In so doing, the author also speaks with the authority of a supernatural being, lending additional weight to the didactic lessons contained therein.

This weight is further reinforced by the demon’s reticence to or strain over speaking the truth. In the Katherine Group version, the demon laments “I will be forced – though much against my will – to do what you will,”⁹⁰ indicating that the demon does not wish to illuminate the means by which it can be defeated but that his hand is forced. Similarly, in CCC version Margaret the demon exclaims toward the end of his monologue “I am speaking truly to you, and therefore I cannot be here any longer.”⁹¹ Thus, not only are these truths supernatural in nature but hard won truths at that, giving them the quality of divine secrets or occult knowledge.

Just as the previously mentioned individuals who doubt the veracity of transubstantiation discover a finger in their mouth when they take the Eucharist, the demon’s words carry a weight that the original author’s would not have. In this way, both authors controlled powerful means to curb or encourage patterns of sexual behavior because they implicitly understood that when a demon speaks, the reader listens.

The analysis of the demon’s speech also further suggests the capacity of Margaret’s narrative to speak to the present concerns of her audience. Whereas in the previous chapter readers were invited to participate in Margaret’s prison scene, the black demon’s speech is instead used by redactors to guide contemporary sexual behavior. By

placing prescriptions and proscriptions in the demon's mouth with which the readers would have identified (or even understood as directly addressing their past transgressions!), the redactors of the *Lives* transformed the demon's speech into a warning that spoke directly to the behavior of their contemporary audiences.

At the same time, this lends additional weight to the *imitationes* performed by Margaret's adherents. The black demon's speech is not a generic address that remains static throughout time, but rather the dialogue of a supernatural creature that is speaking directly to the audience's personal struggles with sexual desire. Once more, the location of the prison scene is not 4th-century Antioch. Instead, the demon is uncomfortably close to the reader, chiding them for their failings and lamenting the path to proper sexual practice that Margaret represents.

Nor is the black creature in Margaret's prison cell the only demon to haunt the sexual identities of her readers. In my next chapter, I will further explore the construction of contemporary sexual roles through the prefect that tortures Margaret, Olibrius. In the versions considered, Olibrius is depicted as a demon wearing human flesh. Alternately described as a confederate of devils and a relation of Satan himself, Olibrius is systematically linked to the demonic and painted as an intrinsically un-Christian figure. Through this depiction, Margaret's battle with Olibrius is not simply that of a poor, virginal shepherdess against a politically powerful prefect, but the resistance of Christianity against its implacable opponents, demons.

However, this is not the only identity which Olibrius bears. In addition to this demonic heritage, Olibrius also bears markers of two or more religious identities (pagan-Jew, pagan-Saracen, or pagan-Jew-Saracen). This hybrid religious identity allows Olibrius to invoke contemporary fears of Jews and Saracens, as well as to solidify the sexual boundaries between Christians and non-Christians.

Notes

- 1 Maud Burnett McInerney, "Rhetoric, Power, and Integrity in the Passion of the Virgin Martyr," in *Menacing Virgins*, ed. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (London: Associated University Press, 1999), 70.
- 2 Carolyn Kinane, "To Imitate and Inspire Awe: Enclosure and Audiences in the Katherine Group Saints' Lives," *Magistra* 17, no. 2 (2011): 52.
- 3 Tracey-Anne Cooper, "Why Is Margaret's the Only Life in London, BL, Cotton MS Tiberius A.Iii?" in *Writing Women Saints in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 80.
- 4 See Sarah Salih's *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England*, esp. Chapter 5.
- 5 "Hercneð, alle þe earen ant herunge habbeð, widewen wið þa iweddede, ant te meidnes nomeliche lusten swiðe ȝeornliche hu ha schulen luuien þe liuende

- Lauerd" (Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1990], 44).
- 6 "uiri, mulieres, uirgines" (Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 194).
 - 7 "alle þe earen ant herunge habbeð, widewen wið þa iweddede, ant te meidnes nomeliche" (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 44).
 - 8 Elaine Treharne, "A Note on the Sensational Old English Life of St Margaret," in *Saints and Scholars: New Perspectives on Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture in Honour of Hugh Magennis*, ed. Stuart McWilliams (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), 8.
 - 9 "audite corde, et intelligite uiri; mulieres, uirgines, <uelut> tenere puelle proponite <uos> in cordibus uestris" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 194).
 - 10 "Ego sum qui multorum labores abstuli. Ego sum qui pugno cum iustis et incendo renes eorum et abceco oculos eorum et facio eos obliuiscere omnem caelestem sapientem. Et cum dormierint uenio super eos et excito illos a somno ad mala opera, et quos non possum mouere de somno facio eos in somno peccare. Quacumque arte uentilo quos sine signaculo crucis Christi inueni <et> contra eos pugnare atque eis nocere non cesso. Illos uero quos cum signaculo sancte crucis signatos inuenio et qui tibi sunt similes confusus et uacuuus ab eis discedo quemadmodum a te hodie. O beata Margareta, quid dicam? Superatus sum a te. Quid faciam ignoro. Arma mea confracta sunt, uirtus mea confusa est, a tenera puella superatus sum" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 208).
 - 11 For example, Hippocrates claims in *Peri gones* that semen is produced by the whole body but that it runs a necessary course through the brain to the reproductive organs via the kidneys and testes. Galen, on the other hand, claims in *De usu partium* that the right and left kidney donate their blood to the creation of semen in men and women's respective reproductive parts (i.e., right kidney to right uterus/testis, etc.) which leads to sex differentiation since "the ones going to the right uterus and right testis start from the great vessels themselves that are along the spine, the vein from the vena cava and the artery from the great artery, but those that reach the left testis in the male or the uterus on that side in the female ... receive blood still uncleansed, full of residues, water and serous, and so it happens that the temperaments of the instruments themselves that receive [the blood] become different" (14.II.306).
 - 12 "Iamminis plumbeis renium contegant loca, metalli rigor genitalibus membris adplicitus obscenos umores ualeat inhibere" (Iohannes Cassianus, *De Institutis Coenobiorum et de Octo Principalium Vitiis Remediis Libri XII; De Incarnatione Domini Contra Nestorium Libri VII*, ed. Michael Petschenig, vol. XVII, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* [Vindobona, Austria: Academiae Litterarum Caesariae Vindobonensis, 1888], 119).
 - 13 Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 160. Indeed, Dyan Elliott points out as well that even monastic apprehension with nocturnal emissions ebbs and flows over time, and was "a matter of concern until the time of Gregory the Great, received only the most routine treatment (mainly in penitential literature) from the seventh until the 12th century, and thereafter commanded increasing attention until the end of the Middle Ages" (Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, & Demonology in the Middle Ages* [Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999], 15). The fact that the Paris version is engaged with Gregory the Great's writings and the manuscript was produced in the early 10th century, brackets the hypothetical date of the production of the narrative within this

timeframe, suggesting that the author may even have been unusually interested in the phenomenon for clergy, let alone the laity.

- 14 “Nulli dubium est quod possint spiritus immundi cogitationum nostrarum attingere qualitates, sed indicii eas sensibilibus forinsecus colligentes, id est aut ex nostris dispositionibus aut ex uerbis et studiis in quae propensius nos perspexerint inclinari ... si fornicationem ingerentes senserint eum patienter telum libidinis suscepisse seu uiderint carne commotum aut certe non ut oportuit aduersum suggestionis immundae suspirasse lasciuiam, intellegunt in penetralibus animae libidinis iaculum fuisse defixum” (Iohannes Cassianus, *Conlationes*, ed. Michael Petschenig, vol. XIII, in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* [Vindobona, Austria: Academiae Litterarum Caesariae Vindobonensis, 1886], 194).
- 15 Peter Damian, “Letter 102,” in *Letters 91–120*, ed. Owen J. Blum (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 135–136.
- 16 Gerald of Wales, *The Jewel of the Church*, ed. John Hagen (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 177–178.
- 17 *Ancrene Wisse*, an anonymous rule for living as an anchoress, was written sometime around the second quarter of the 13th century. The guide is roughly separated into eight parts which have two further divisions of the Outer Rule (parts 1 and 8 which deal with exterior elements of the anchoritic life such as dress, habitation, and behavior) and the Inner Rule (parts 2–7 which relate to the interior elements of anchoritic life such as kinds of love and the wiles of the devil). In all likelihood, *Ancrene Wisse* was originally written for three sisters (who are frequently referenced in manuscript versions) and later adapted for wider audiences, including a reference in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 to a larger community of twenty or more women (Yoko Wada, “What Is *Ancrene Wisse*?,” in *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Yoko Wada [Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 2003], 1–4).
- 18 Tolkien’s article could be viewed as something of a setback for the search for audience as well when he declared “‘By whom’ and ‘for whom’ are sentimental questions, and knowledge at any rate of the latter is not likely to have any importance to scholarship. Neither is likely to be answered by any form of research, short of miraculous luck” (J.R.R. Tolkien, “*Ancrene Wisse* and Hali Meïðhad,” in *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, Collected by H.W. Gerrod, vol. 14, 1929, 116).
- 19 Bella Millett, “The Audience of the Saints’ Lives of the Katherine Group,” *Reading Medieval Studies* 16 (1990): 127–156.
- 20 Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, xiii.
- 21 Julie Bond Hassel, *Choosing Not to Marry: Women and Autonomy in the Katherine Group* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 4.
- 22 Hassel, *Choosing Not to Marry*, 32.
- 23 “Ne nawt nart tu, wummon, opfre wummen ilich. Me þuncheð þet tu schinest schenre þen þe sunne; ah ouer alle þine limen þe leitið of leome, þe fingres se freoliche me þuncheð, ant se feire, ant se briht blikinde, þet tu þe wið blescedest ant makedest te merke of þe mihti rode þe reauede me mi broðer, ant me wið bale bondes bitterliche bindest, þet Ich lokin ne mei, swa þet leomeð ant leiteð, me þuncheð.” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 64–66).
- 24 “Þu fikest, quoð ha, ‘ful wiht’” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 66).
- 25 Anne M. O’Donnell, “Cicero, Gregory the Great, and Thomas More: Three Dialogues of Comfort,” *Moreana* 100 (1989): 172.
- 26 Particularly because of this the Katherine Group version does not contain the Paris’ versions additional requirement that the person crossing themselves “be

like Margaret.”

- 27 The word choice of *wunien* may be a play on words by the author, since it not only means “to be present” or “abide” but also contains the sense of cohabiting with a mate and having sexual relations. In this way, the Katherine Group version may be implying that proximity leads to sexual activity.
- 28 *Plohe-speche*, literally “playful speech.” Given the topic of the demon’s discussion, flirtation seems a likely valence of the term.
- 29 “Wumme, leafdi!” quod he þa, ‘wa me mine liues, bute Ich hit am þet weorri a wið rihtwise ... þe gode Ich ga aa bisiliche abuten, ant ham Ich folhi neodelukest þe cunnið to beon cleane wiðuten monnes man ant fleoð flesches fulðen, 3ef Ich mahte eanies weis makien ham to fallen ant fulen hamseoluen. Moni Ich habbe awarpen þe wenden mine wiheles ful witerliche etwrenchen, ant o þisse wise. Ich leote oðerhwiles a cleane mon wunien neh a cleane wummon, þet Ich nawiht towart ham ne warpe ne ne weorri, ah leote ham al iwurðen. Ich leote ham talkin of Godd an teuelin of godlec, ant trewliche luuien ham wiðuten uuel wilnunge ant alle unwreste willes, þet eiðer of his ahne, ant of þe oðres ba, treowliche beo trusti, ant te sikerure beon to sitten bi hamseoluen ant gomenin togederes. Þenne þurh þis sikerlec seche Ich earst upon ham, ant scheote swiðe dearnliche ant wundi, ear ha witen hit, wið swiðe attri healewi hare unwarre heorte. Lihtliche on alre earest, wið lueeleche lates, wið steape bihaldunge eiðer on oðer; ant wið plohe-speche sputte to mare, se longe þet ha toggið ant tollið togederes. Þenne þudde Ich in ham luuefule þohtes – on earest hare unþonkes, ah swa waxeð þet wa þurh þet ha hit þeauieð þet ham þuncheð god þrof. Ant Ich þus, hwen ha leoteð me, ne ne letteð me nawt ne ne steorið hamseolf ne ne stondeð strongliche a3ein, leade ham i þe leuien ant i þe ladike lake of þet suti sunne” (Millet and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 66).
- 30 “Nu bihalt te alde feond, ant sið þe i þis mihte stonde se hehe ... ant scheoteð niht ant dei his earewen, idrencte of an attri healewi, towart tin heorte to wundi þe wið wac wil, for swa muche þe hokerluker him þuncheð to beon ouercumen, þet þing se feble as flesh is, ant nomeliche of wummon, schal him ouerstihen. Euch fleshlich wil ant lust of leccherie þe ariseð i þe heorte is þes feondes fla; ah hit ne wundeð þe nawt bute hit festni in þe, ant leaue se longe þet tu waldest þet ti wil were ibroht to werke. Hwil þi wit edstont, ant chastieð þi wil, þah þi lust beore to þet te leof were, ne hearmed hit te nawiht, ne suleð þi sawle; for wit is hire scheld under Godes grace. Hwil þe scheld is ihal – þet is, þe wisdom of þi wit – þet hit ne brooke ne beie, þah þi fleshliche wil fals beo þerunder ant walde as hire luste, þes feondes flan fleoð a3ein alle on himseoluen” (Millet and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 12–14).
- 31 Another parallel presents itself here as well: The devil in *Hali Meidhad* is ashamed of being overcome by a woman, a sentiment expressed by the devil in *Seinte Margarete* as well (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 70).
- 32 “3ef ha edstonden wulleð mine unwreste wrenches ant mine swikele swenges, wreastlin ha moten ant wiðerin wið hamseoluen; ne me akeasten ha ne mahen ear ha hamseoluen ouercumen, Lað me is ant noðeles nedlunge Ich do hit, cuðe þe hu ha mahen best ouercume me.... Þis beoð þe wepnen þet me wurst wundið, ant witeð ham unwemmet ant strengð ham sterclukest a3ein me ant a3ein ham ant hare wake lustes – þet beoð: – Eoten meaðeliche ant meadeluker drinken. Do þet flesh i sum derf, ne neauer ne beon idel. Hali monne bone for ham, wið hare ahne; ant beodefule þohtes þet ha schulen þenchen bimong hare benen, a3ein unwresteð þohtes þet Ich in ham þudde, þenchen hit is þurh me þet hare lust leadeð ham to wurche to wundre; þenchen 3ef ha beieð me, to hu bitter beast ha buheð, ant hwas luue ha forleteð; hu lufsum þing ha leoseð, þet

is, wið meïðhad meidenes menske, ant te luue of þe luueleiche Lauerd of heouene ant of þe lufsume cwen, englene leafdi; ant henlunges makieð ha wið al þet heouenliche hird, ant unmenskið hamseolf bimong worldliche men, ant forleoseð þe luue nawt ane of heh in heouene ah of lah ec on eorðe, ant makieð þe engles murne ant us of much murhðe to lahhe se lude, þe seoð ham lihte se lah of se swiðe hehe, from þe heste in heouene to þe laheste in helle. Þis ha moten ofte munien bi hamseolfen,

*Benchen hu swart þing ant suti is þet sunne;
Benchen of helle-wa ant of heouriche wunne;
Hare ahne deað ant Drihtenes munegin ful ilome,
Ant te grisle ant te grure þet bið et te dome;*

Benchen þet te licunge of þet fleschliche lust alið se swiðe sone, ant te pine þeruore leasteð aa mare. At sone se ha gulteð eawiht, gan anan uorðriht þet ha ne firstin hit nawt to schawen hit i schrifte, ne beo hit ne se lutel ne se liht sunne. For þet is under sunne þinge me laðest, þet me ofte eorne to schrift of his sunne. For þet lutle Iche me makien to mutlin unmeaðliche 3ef me hut ant heleð hit; ah sone se hit ischawet bið birewsinde i schrifte, þenne scheomeð me þerwið, ant fleo ham from schuderinde as Ich ischend were” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 66–68).

- 33 Credit for the italicized portion of the translation goes to Millett and Wogan-Browne, rhyming a translation while retaining its meaning is no easy task and underscores the exceptional nature of their translation.
- 34 Contemplation of eternal punishment, restraint in diet, and mortification of flesh are all tried and true methods of defeating sexual arousal in the narrative so far considered: St. Anthony ruminates upon the fires of hell and becoming a feast for worms upon his death to defeat the initial onslaught of the Spirit of Fornication; Cassian cautions individuals in the *Institutes* to cause the humors to become slow and sluggish through fasting (a notion echoed in the *Conferences*: Chapters II.XVIII–XXVI deal extensively with proper abstention from food and appropriate fasting. Chapter II.XXIII even deals with the impact of such fasting upon the seminal fluid; a clear connection between restraint in diet and sexuality); and in the *Life of St. Benedict*, the titular character is so overcome with desire at remembering a woman from his youth that he is forced to doff his clothes and roll naked in a briar patch in order to free himself from the sting of the devil’s temptation.
- 35 For example, the demon refers to “the prayers of holy men for them, along with their own” suggesting that the referent of the pronoun is not a “holy man,” and that the “precious thing” that they lose is “the honor of a maiden with their virginity.”
- 36 “Ne nis þear na bote bute fleo þenne, þet nowðer ne beo nohwer ane wið oðer, ne seon ham ne sompnin ne sitten togederes wiðuten wittnesse þet mahe iseon wheat ha don ant heren hwet ha seggen. 3ef ha þus ne letteð me nawt, ah beauieð me ant polieð, ant weneð þah to edwrenchen, Ich leade ham wið leas luue lutlen ant lutlen into se deop dunge þet ha druncið þerin; ant sperki in ham sperken of lustes se luðere þet ha forberneð inwið ant þurh þet brune ablindeð, þet ha nabbeð sihðe nan hamseolue to biseonne” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 68).
- 37 “am in hare beddes se bisi ham abuten þet summes weis ha schulen ham slepinde sulen” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 70).
- 38 “Ah þe rode merke merreð me oueral, ant meast ed te nuðe” (Millett and Wogan-Brown, *Medieval English Prose*, 70). It should be noted that this is not a

change of partition: the demon specifically states that he only assaults in their sleep those whom he fails to seduce via the other methods discussed.

- 39 See, for instance, Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 60–62 and Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 35.
- 40 Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 15.
- 41 For example, “if someone is carrying a precious liquor, a valuable liquid like balm, in a fragile vessel, an ointment in a brittle glass, would she not avoid a crowd, unless she were a fool? *Habemus thesaurum istum in vasis fictilibus, dicit apostolus*. This brittle vessel, which is woman’s flesh – though the balm, the ointment is maidenhood held within it (or chaste purity once maidenhood is lost) – this brittle vessel is nonetheless as brittle as any glass; for if it is once broken, it is never mended to the wholeness it had, any more than glass” (Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, eds., *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works* [New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991], 109). Translations are Savage and Watson’s.
- 42 Although *Ancrene Wisse* seems to lack the vituperative language that characterizes *Hali Meïðhad*’s perspective on marriage, noting only that “for, except in wedlock, it amounts to a mortal sin in whatever way it is wakeningly and willingly satisfied for the flesh’s pleasure” (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, 124).
- 43 For example, “holy men and women are tested most often with every kind of temptation, and for their better health; for through fighting against them, they win the joyful crown of the champion” (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, 119).
- 44 For example, “yet the devil naturally urges us to poison, for example to pride, to disdain, to envy and to anger, and to their poisonous offspring” (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, 119).
- 45 “Therefore, dear sister, as soon as you ever notice this dog of hell coming sneaking with his blood flies of stinking thoughts, do not lie still, or sit either, to see what he will do or how far he will go ... But seize the staff of the cross right away, by naming it with your mouth, by drawing it with your hand, by thinking of it with your heart, and order him sternly, the foul cur” (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, 154).
- 46 “Lechery comes of gluttony and of bodily ease, for as St. Gregory says, ‘More food and drink than is necessary breed three offspring, light words, light works and lechery’s lusts’” (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, 153).
- 47 Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, 68. The two texts also seem to be concerned with outward appearances, either the outward appearance of a platonic friendship that causes the virgin to let down her guard, or the outward appearance of holiness which does the same.
- 48 Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, 69.
- 49 Instead, the author notes that “it is as good as over for those who comes so close together that they handle on another or in any way touch one another” and advises the anchorite to guard against lechery’s three kinds of weapons (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, 70).
- 50 Savage and Watson translate “ne toggen mid him, ne pleien” as “sport or flirt” (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, 205). I have simply clarified the first word *toggen* which is the same in both *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group version.
- 51 Kinane, “To Imitate and Inspire Awe,” 33–34.
- 52 “And lay into [the dog of hell] with hard blows fiercely on the back with the staff of the holy cross ... With imploring prayers in your own language, drive your knees sharply down to the earth and lift up the staff of the cross and swing

it in four directions against the hell-dog: this is nothing else than to bless yourself all around with the sign of the holy cross. Spit at him in his beard with contempt and scorn, who trifles so with you and deceives you with dog-like fawning, when he bargains with such worthless things – with the satisfaction of a single lust for so brief a time – for your soul” (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, 154).

- 53 The *Life of St. Margaret* is one of three unique saints’ homilies that are not part of Ælfric’s corpus, the others being the *Life of St. Giles* and the *Life of St. Nicholas* (Mary Richards, “Texts and Their Traditions in the Medieval Library of Rochester Cathedral Priory,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 78, no. 3 [1988]: 90).
- 54 Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 92–93.
- 55 Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 93.
- 56 Richards, “Texts and Their Traditions,” 90. Treharne amends this date to c. 1150 for unclear reasons, citing Richards’ work on the dating. Although the footnote is unclear, this may be part of the findings that “now require modification” (Treharne, “A Note on the Sensational Old English Life,” 5 fn. 2).
- 57 Richards, “Texts and Their Traditions,” 91.
- 58 Richards, “Texts and Their Traditions,” 92.
- 59 Hugh Magennis, “‘Listen Now All and Understand’: Adaptation of Hagiographical Material for Vernacular Audiences in the Old English Lives of St. Margaret,” *Speculum* 71, no. 1 (1996): 40.
- 60 Treharne, “A Note on the Sensational Old English Life,” 6.
- 61 Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 61–62.
- 62 Treharne, “A Note on the Sensational Old English Life,” 8.
- 63 Treharne, “A Note on the Sensational Old English Life,” 6–7.
- 64 That is, there was in fact a “dual” audience – one monastic and one lay – to whom the text was originally addressed.
- 65 “Siððan Sathan gebunden wearð, siððan ic mid mannum æfre gewunode and manega Godes þeowas ic gehwearf fram Gode and næfre ne mihte me nan man ofercuman buton þu ane. Minne broþor þu ofsloge and þu mines eall gewæld ahst, forþan ic geseo þæt God is mid þe. And get ic þe mare secge of minum dædum ealle syndrige. For ic nam ealle wæstmes fram mancynne þe on Gode gelefdon: sume ic spræce benam and sume heora hlyste; sumen heora fet and sume heora handa, and heo þurh þæt creopeles wurðon; sumum ic eagen benam and sumum his gewittes; sume ic slæpende beswac and sume eac wacigende; sume mid winde and sume mid wætere; sume mid mæte and sume mid drænce, ofte þonne hio ungebletsodon wæren; sume mid slehte and sume on some; sume on morðdædum and sume mid oðres mannes wife gehæmdon; sume mid feowerfoted nytene for minum willen gefremedon and sume heora eldran mid wordon gegræmedon” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 164). While the Old English forms here do not appear to be poetic to me, the repetitive nature of *sume/sume mid* gives the final portion of the piece a sibilant and sing-song quality when read aloud (possibly even snake-like). As such, I have retained the repetition here as it seems something deliberate on the part of the redactor.
- 66 Mk 5:1–20, Mt 8:28–34, and Lk 8:26–39.
- 67 Mt 9:1–8, Mk 2:1–12, and Lk 5:17–26.
- 68 Mk 7:31–37.
- 69 “nan unhal cild sy geboren, ne crypol, ne dumb, ne deaf, ne blind, ne ungewittes” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 168).
- 70 I am deeply indebted to the works of Joyce E. Salisbury in negotiating this complexity, including *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York:

- Routledge, 1994) and “Bestiality in the Middle Ages,” in *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1991), 173–186.
- 71 See, for instance, Hani Miletski, *Understanding Bestiality and Zoophilia* (Bethesda, MD: East-West Publishing, LLC, 2002) and Anthony L. Podberscek and Andrea M. Beetz, eds. *Bestiality and Zoophilia: Sexual Relations with Animals* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005).
- 72 Further complicated by the fact that some animals engaged in intercourse as humans did (e.g., bears and elephants; Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, 81–83).
- 73 Salisbury, *The Beast within*, 78–79. Salisbury also notes that Christians were grappling with the classical inheritance regarding bestiality as well.
- 74 John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the 14th Century* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 323.
- 75 Mark Jordan, “Homosexuality, Luxuria, and Textual Abuse,” in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 30.
- 76 Salisbury, *The Beast within*, 90. This slowly changed as the edicts of the Council of Ancyra (314) which equated bestiality with same-sex intercourse were spread (91).
- 77 See, for instance, Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (Routledge: New York, 1990) which notes on page 106: “the thirteen-century English law code, *Fleta*, declared: ... ‘Those cohabiting with Jews or Jewesses, those engaged in bestiality and sodomy are to be burned alive’.” Thus, the three acts (sodomy, bestiality, and inter-racial sex) all become lumped together under one category with on prescriptive punishment.
- 78 Albrecht Classen, “The Cultural Significance of Sexuality in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and Beyond: A Secret Continuous Undercurrent or a Dominant Phenomenon of the Premodern World? Or: The Irrepressibility of Sex Yesterday and Today,” in *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme*, Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 15.
- 79 Pierre Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code, 550–1500* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 120.
- 80 Arnold Davidson, “Sex and the Emergence of Sexuality,” *Critical Inquiry* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1987): 16–48, 37. An example of this confusion can be seen in Boswell’s landmark work *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1st printing 1980) in which Boswell made use of the term “homosexuality” a term with very specific connotations and suggestions of social cohesion which was not found prior to the 19th century. For more information on this controversy, see Mathew Kuefler, *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- 81 Peter Dendle notes that this reference is “uncommonly explicit for non-penitential literature of the time, especially hagiography” (Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature* [Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2001], 55).
- 82 Again, see Miletski, *Understanding Bestiality and Zoophilia* and Podberscek and Beetz, *Bestiality and Zoophilia*.
- 83 Abraham Maslow and James Sakoda, “Volunteer-Error in the Kinsey Study,” *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 47, no. 2 (April 1952): 259–262. Maslow and Sakoda identify volunteer-bias in sexual studies as the prevalence of high esteem individuals more willing to share their sexual exploits while low-

- esteem individuals were less willing. Bias is introduced because Maslow discovered in a separate study that high-esteem individuals are statistically more likely to engage in “unconventional sexual behavior” (Maslow and Sakoda, “Volunteer-Error in the Kinsey Study,” 262).
- 84 D. Richard Laws and William O'Donohue, eds., *Sexual Deviance: Theory, Assessment, and Treatment* (New York: The Guildford Press, 2008), 391.
 - 85 Beetz, “Bestiality and Zoophilia,” 48.
 - 86 Alfred Charles Kinsey, Wardell Baxter Pomeroy, and Clyde Eugene Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia, PA: W.B. Saunders Company, 1948), 671.
 - 87 Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior*, 675.
 - 88 Jonas Liliequist, “Peasants against Nature: Crossing the Boundaries between Man and Animal in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Sweden,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1, no. 3 (January 1991): 414. This may also suggest an alternate reading of the penitentials with regard to bestiality. While Salisbury argues that the penitentials continue the tradition of Germanic law codes of viewing age as a mitigating factor (Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, 89), it may also be that bestiality was viewed as more acceptable for children who had no other “proper” outlet for their burgeoning sexuality. Support for this view could be further argued by the fact that penitentials seemed to view bestiality performed by unmarried adults as a lesser sin (and thus, deserving of a lesser penalty) than when the act was performed by married adults (Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, 90).
 - 89 Treharne, “A Note on the Sensational Old English Life,” 8.
 - 90 “Ich mot nede – noðeles min unwillis hit is – don þet ti wil is” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 64).
 - 91 “ic soðlice þe to sprece and for þi ne mæg ic na læng beon” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 166).

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4 Circumcising Olibrius

Threatening sexuality and religious alterity in the *Life of St. Margaret*

In the first three chapters, I addressed monsters in Margaret's narrative that were overtly inhuman. The dragon of the Mombritius version – though sporting certain human characteristics such as a beard – has iron teeth, pants fire, and is large enough to swallow Margaret in one gulp. The demon – though less obviously physically monstrous – bears the black skin used as a marker of lust in the writings of the desert fathers and speaks of being enclosed in glass jars and moving invisibly among people to tempt them to sin.

I now turn my attention to Margaret's most human opponent: the prefect who persecutes her, Olibrius. Next to Margaret, Olibrius is arguably the most frequently analyzed character in studies of the various *Lives of St. Margaret*. Considering that Olibrius' purpose within the narrative framework of the *Lives* is to contest Margaret's claim to virginity and her commitment to Christianity, it is not surprising that many scholars write about Olibrius in light of his reaction to Margaret. Maud Burnett McNerney argues in "Rhetoric, Power, Integrity and the Passion of the Virgin Martyr" that the attempts by the Olibrius of the Katherine Group version to convert Margaret to paganism are indistinguishable from his assaults on her chastity, and that Olibrius' increasing use of force throughout the narrative is an attempt to silence the increasing power of Margaret's words.¹ Regarding the Olibrius of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Elaine Treharne claims that he is "utterly inactive,"² a passivity that is reflected in the gods he worships and which makes room for the active and efficacious speech and prayer in which Margaret engages. In *Flesh Made Word*, Aviad Kleinberg asserts that the *Golden Legend* Olibrius' reaction to Margaret's beauty "combines the sexual and the political, the physical body and the body politic," and that Margaret's rejection of Olibrius' sexual advances converts this body from "a source of pleasure to a battleground of wills."³ Tracy-Anne Cooper argues for another manifestation of the body politic acting upon the character, claiming that the Olibrius of BL Cotton Tiberius A.iii is constrained in his lust by the negative legal ramifications of having sex with a Christian while in his position as a Roman prefect.⁴

Cooper's piece also begins to explore elements of Olibrius' identity that do not wholly depend upon his reaction to Margaret, namely his ethnic/religious identity. In doing so, Cooper joins several other scholars who reflexively label Olibrius as a "Roman"⁵ or "pagan."⁶ While this is certainly a historically and narratively appropriate assumption,⁷ it can obscure the presence of different forms of religious alterity that other scholars have pointed to. For instance, Siobhain Bly Calkin notes that the Auchinleck Manuscript refers to Olibrius and Margaret's persecutors as Saracens,⁸ which allowed readers to "imaginatively revise late 13th-century crusading setbacks, and envision an overwhelming Christian triumph that would have gladdened the hearts of English proponents of crusade in the early 14th century."⁹ Similarly, Ruth Evans has made note of the way Jewishness is associated with Olibrius through the accusation that his ancestors killed Christ.¹⁰

In this chapter, I will argue that Olibrius represents a series of polar opposites to Margaret's character. The first of these poles is sexual: Margaret's identity in the narrative is sex-negative, whereas Olibrius is sex-positive.¹¹ It is Olibrius' desire that Margaret share his sex-positive nature that drives the narrative. However, Margaret's sex-negative nature is intrinsically bound up in her Christian faith, which leads Olibrius to threaten Margaret's Christian nature at the same time that he threatens her sexual one.

Since Margaret's Christian identity is predicated around this sex-negative pole, Olibrius' religious identity takes on the opposite value – "un-Christian" – in two ways. First, each of the texts in question associate Olibrius with demonic forces, the ultimate adversary of Christianity. As I will show, this is accomplished either through associations between Olibrius and the demons Margaret will eventually face in her prison cell¹² or by associating Olibrius with Satan.

However, Olibrius cannot be made entirely demonic, since he is clearly a very human character (e.g., he has social rank, wishes to marry and copulate with Margaret in a very human fashion, etc.). This forces the texts to associate Olibrius with other *human* un-Christian elements, namely pagans, Jews, or Saracens. At this stage, I will be building on points other scholars have made (i.e., Bly Calkin and Evans) about specific versions of Margaret's *Life* by broadening the scope to multiple versions. Doing so reveals that the opposite value of Christian is not distinctly pagan, Jew, or Saracen, rather the narratives create a hybrid identity that contains an amalgamation of traits and descriptors that point to no particular religious group but instead to an ill-defined "enemy" of all Christendom. Nevertheless, as individual scribes alter terminology in the story they (un?)intentionally

emphasize certain traits in this amalgamation, either making Olibrius resemble a particular religious group to a greater degree (as the Old English texts under consideration do with Jewish identity) or by introducing a new religious group into the mix (as the Middle English *Lives* do with Saracens/Muslims). These alterations to Olibrius then combine with his demonic sexuality to reinforce already salient sexual boundaries between Christians and other religious groups over the diachronic stretch of the *Lives*.

Demonic sexuality

To begin, I will address the relationship between Margaret's virginity, Olibrius' sexuality, and the demonic elements of the narrative. Since my own analysis builds from McNerney's,¹³ a brief summary of her work is in order. According to McNerney, Olibrius' attempts on Margaret's chastity (his sexual desires) are indistinguishable from his demands that she convert (his religious desires). To elaborate further, the narrative places Olibrius in such a position that his sexual urges cannot be consummated until Margaret becomes un-Christian (to use my own term). It is this sexual desire that predates and informs his desire for Margaret's conversion. Thus, while Margaret's primary agenda in the narrative is to maintain her Christian identity, Olibrius' goal is to consummate his sexual lust, a goal that cannot be realized until his primary impediment (Margaret's virginity predicated upon her Christian identity) is removed.

Building on McNerney's point, I argue that in each of the versions under consideration, the descriptions and dialogue attributed to Olibrius create a connection between the character of the prefect and the demonic (typically and more specifically, the demons that Margaret will eventually encounter in her prison cell or the Devil himself). This ties the character of Olibrius to the demonic agenda in the narrative¹⁴ which intrinsically changes his theological position: Olibrius is not a human being who happens not to be Christian, but a confederate to demons who can *never* be Christian, an "Other" with no chance of assimilation. Moreover, as with all legends of martyrs, both characters stand for larger worldly and theological positions beyond the roles that they play in the story. Thus, as Margaret contends against Olibrius, it is not only two characters arrayed against each other, but truth against falsehood, Christ against his persecutors, the weak against the strong, and the Christian against his or her enemy. In this larger, transhistorical narrative, as the sole named representative of his tradition, Olibrius becomes the symbol of his entire religious group: In the reader's imagination, Olibrius' flaws become his religious groups' flaws, his desires signify the desires of the entire

group, and his sexuality – a sexuality guided by demons that renders the object of its desires intrinsically un-Christian – becomes theirs.

As I have in previous chapters, I begin with the Paris version. As previously noted, the Paris version is a Latin version of the *Life of St. Margaret* found in Paris, BN, lat. 5574,¹⁵ attributed to Mercia, and dated to c.900,¹⁶ making it one of the earliest *Lives of St. Margaret* written in England. It is also a representative of the Mombritius tradition, the same tradition to which the version in BL Cotton Nero E.1 belongs and the inspiration for the vast majority of vernacular English *Lives* (including the Stanzaic *Life* and the version in Ashmole Codex 61 under consideration here). Moreover, the Cotton Tiberius A.iii *Life* and the *Life* in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 have as their inspiration a similar tradition (the Mombritius/Pre-Mombritius tradition), making all of the *Lives* in question rather similar to one another. As a result, I will be treating the Paris version in detail and afterward weaving in relevant portions of the other *Lives* under consideration into this analysis.¹⁷

When Olibrius first comes upon Margaret's city he is "traveling from Asia to the city of Antioch to persecute Christians and urge them to adore his empty gods, and when he heard anyone mention Christ, he would immediately shackle them with iron bonds."¹⁸ Seeing Margaret "he immediately desired her"¹⁹ and commands his attendants to discover her sexual availability.²⁰ However, when the attendants approach to capture her, she offers a lengthy prayer to God, a prayer which indicates to the soldiers that she is Christian. Returning to Olibrius, they report, "Lord, your power cannot be in common with her, because she doesn't serve our gods, but invokes God and worships Christ whom the Jews crucified."²¹ Upon hearing this, Olibrius becomes angry and demands that Margaret recount her social status and religion.²² Upon hearing that she is Christian and a virgin, he then orders her to be "locked up in the prison until he might discover through what machination he might destroy her virginity."²³

This opening serves to both outline and foreshadow Olibrius' relationship to Margaret. From their first meeting, Olibrius sexually desires Margaret: his first encounter with her is not through the medium of his persecution of Christians but rather the medium of his own desire for her beauty. Unable to imagine that she is sexually unavailable to him, he sends his attendants not to request her company or ask if she returns his interest, but rather to simply find out the most socially appropriate way to sate his carnal desires. When his attendants return, Olibrius is enraged that the object of his desire is Christian. However, he still insists that she attend him so that he might question her. As the story has already noted, Olibrius frequently claps in irons those who mention the name of Christ; the fact that he

does not do so to Margaret suggests he holds out hope that she can be persuaded to capitulate to his sexual desires.

It is in the context of this questioning that Margaret reveals to Olibrius that she calls upon “the omnipotent God and his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has kept my virginity intact and inviolate until the present day.”²⁴ Through this statement, Margaret solidifies the relationship between her religion and her sexual unavailability to Olibrius: for Margaret, the worship of Christ and her virginity are synonymous with each other. Furious at being thwarted, Olibrius imprisons Margaret, but the narrative makes it clear that, although Olibrius may eventually torture Margaret in an effort to effect a conversion, his true goal is “violating her virginity.”

The (heavy-handed and violent) plan that Olibrius concocts to void Margaret’s virginity is torture. The following day, Olibrius brings her to a *tribunal* to be tortured. Before he does so, Olibrius asks Margaret to “have pity on the beauty of your body and on your tenderness. Moreover, give in to me and adore my gods and I will give you great wealth and it will be good for you above all my household.”²⁵ Facing Margaret’s second refusal, Olibrius then adds a more overt threat to his request:

If you will not worship my gods, my sword will devour your flesh and I will destroy your bones over a burning [*ardentem*] flame. But if you obey me and worship my gods and you join your body with mine in love, behold, before everyone I say to you: I will accept you as my bride and it will be as good for you as it is for me.²⁶

Once more encountering Margaret’s refusal, Olibrius then commands his torturers to beat her with rods. Despite the outpouring of her blood and the plaintive cries of the crowd,²⁷ Margaret once more rejects Olibrius, and offers an extended commentary on his behavior including “You do the works of Satan.”²⁸ Continuing her tirade against Olibrius, she claims he is a “horrible, insatiable lion, abominable to the Lord, confounded by Christ,”²⁹ a title that appears to be repeated when she prays to God to “save me from the mouth of the lion and my humility from the horns of the unicorns.”³⁰ Finally, Olibrius threatens Margaret once more that “if you will not listen to me, my sword will devour your flesh and I will destroy your bones.”³¹ Finding Margaret still unswayed, Olibrius then confines her to prison for a second time.

Given Olibrius’ sexual goals, it is not surprising that this scene is replete with sexual implications: Olibrius makes mention of Margaret’s beauty and desirability (e.g., “the beauty of your body”) throughout the scene and indicates that if Margaret “joins her body to his in love,” he will have her as his wife. The crowd surrounding Margaret similarly weeps for the loss of her beauty and comments on the

beating her “nude” body has received. Even the threatening language that Olibrius uses in the scene is sexually charged, warning as he does that his sword will “devour” Margaret’s flesh and that her bones will be consumed in an ardent fire.

Yet, there is a demonic element to the scene as well, one which binds the character of Olibrius to the demonic visitors in Margaret’s prison cell. As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), the description of the dragon in the Paris version is sexually charged, bearing as it does something that “seems like a two-edged sword [*gladius*] in its hand”³² and panting fire from its nostrils as it seeks to devour Margaret. This is a direct reflection of the earlier sexually charged threat when Olibrius claims his sword [*gladius*] will devour Margaret and her bones will be burnt in an ardent fire. On some level, both of these threats are carried out by the dragon: the creature does “devour” Margaret and when Margaret first encounters the dragon, her bones are metaphorically destroyed when she turns “as pale as grass and the fear of death fell upon her and all her bones were shattered.”³³

In addition to this association with the demonic dragon in Margaret’s cell, Olibrius is also painted more generally with a devilish brush. During her indictment of Olibrius’ actions, Margaret claims “you do the works of Satan.” This attribution is later reinforced by Margaret addressing Olibrius as an “insatiable lion,” an appellation that, when combined with threats of devouring Margaret’s flesh, recalls 1 Peter 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”³⁴

The similarities between Olibrius and the dragon are further drawn in the Latin version of the *Life* in Cotton Nero E.1 (hereafter, Nero version) and the Old English version in Cotton Tiberius A.iii (Tiberius version).³⁵ As in the Paris version, Olibrius sees Margaret and desires her great beauty, discovers she is Christian, and tortures her amid sexually charged statements of violence.³⁶ Margaret rejects his advances, and the members of the crowd once more cry out against the abuse of her body and her nudity.

Both texts also link Olibrius with the dragon in Margaret’s cell. In the Tiberius version, this association is drawn rather directly through Margaret’s curse against Olibrius: “you vile dog, and you insatiable dragon.”³⁷ The Nero text, in contrast, goes about this association much more obliquely. In the Nero text, Margaret once more refers to Olibrius as an “insatiable lion” and as one who does the work of Satan, finally praying to God to “save me from the mouth of the lion and my humility from the horns of the unicorns.”³⁸ When Margaret first encounters the dragon in her prison cell, it is: completely covered in hair and with his beard of gold. It appeared to

have teeth of iron and its eyes gleamed like a pearl. And from his nostrils came fire and smoke. His tongue panted over his neck. The serpent was like a glittering sword and he made a stench in the prison and hissed powerfully and a light was made in the prison from the fire which came from the mouth of the lion.³⁹

While the author of the Nero version downplays the overtly sexual language of the Paris in Margaret's visitation (save for the panting of the tongue), the dragon is itself described as a "sword" and a "lion," reminding the reader of the sword Olibrius threatens Margaret with and her epithet for him: "insatiable lion." In this scene, the dragon both becomes the sword through which Olibrius attempts to dominate Margaret's body as well as standing in for Olibrius, "lion" for "lion." Despite the lack of sexual descriptors on the dragon's body, the black demon provides further evidence that both Olibrius and the dragon are after the same thing: "I sent my brother Rufus in the form of a dragon in order to absorb you and bear your memory from the earth and overwhelm your virginity and destroy your beauty."⁴⁰ Not only does this passage directly suggest that the dragon is meant to "overwhelm" Margaret's virginity (as Olibrius hopes to), but it also further recalls the pleas of the crowd, when they caution Margaret "that prefect is terribly angry and hastens to destroy you and wipe your memory from the earth."⁴¹

Unlike the Paris, Nero and Tiberius versions, the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College⁴² version (CCC version) and Stanzaic *Life*⁴³ make no effort to link Olibrius with the dragon in Margaret's cell. In the CCC version, I suspect that this may be the case because the dragon in Margaret's cell fails to swallow her:

And the devil [the dragon] was angry and wanted to swallow up the girl. And the blessed girl thoroughly blessed herself against the demon with her right hand and on her forehead made the sign of the cross and so protected herself against the dragon. And that blessed maiden, whole and unhurt, turned from him. And the dragon burst to pieces and vanished from the prison and she felt no evil.⁴⁴

Since, the dragon of the Paris, Nero, and Tiberius versions engages with Margaret in a very physical way (devouring her), Olibrius' threats – and his association with the dragon – are based on physical associations (swords, fire, and phrases that directly connect the two antagonists together, effectively making Olibrius, on a metaphorical level, the dragon). Since the CCC version does not contain this physical engagement, the text looks elsewhere for its demonic associations.

Similarly, while the Stanzaic *Life* does include Margaret being swallowed by the dragon, it is significantly shorter than any other version under consideration:

There sche sawe a lothelye dragon in a corner glyde,
 Brennyng as the blake fyre. His mouthe he gaped wyde.
 That mayde wexed alle greene as the gresse in someres tyde.
 The lowe fleye oute from his tonge as the fyre of brymeston.
 That mayde felle to grounde tylle sche craked everye boone.
 He toke her up in his mowthe; he swallowed her anoon;
 Thorugh vertue of her he braste, that harme hadde sche noon.⁴⁵

In fact, the description focuses primarily upon Margaret and her response to the dragon rather than any description of the demonic creature, limiting the associations that could be drawn between the beast in Margaret's cell and the one that tortures her.

Instead, both versions establish a demonic lineage for Olibrius, directly equating his desires with demons and Satan. In the CCC version, when Olibrius' soldiers first come upon Margaret she prays to God that "devils may not seduce my soul,"⁴⁶ and as she is being tortured by Olibrius, she prays "have mercy on me and deliver me from the power of the Devil." Olibrius is later genealogically associated with the Devil by Margaret who addresses him when she says "You do your father's work, who is the Devil himself."⁴⁷

The Stanzaic *Life* creates similar parallels between demons and the Devil. In the beginning of the Stanzaic *Life*, Olibrius is described as the lord "Of Asye and Antioche, to geven and to selle./He served both nyghthe and daye the foule fendys of helle./And alle that beleved on Jhesu Cryste, he fondes hem to qwelle."⁴⁸ Upon being approached by Olibrius' servants, Margaret prays that "If Thi swete wyll were, an angel me Thou sende,/From this foule gostys I may me defende."⁴⁹ Finally, Margaret claims of Olibrius "Thou doyste as thou kenneste after Sathanas thin eme,"⁵⁰ establishing an uncle-nephew relationship between Satan and Olibrius,⁵¹ just as the CCC version established a father-son relationship.

Despite this shift in associations between Olibrius and the dragon, his sexual nature remains little changed. For example, when the Margaret of the Stanzaic *Life* is brought before Olibrius, he tells her: "my lemman thou schalte be,/And I thee wyll wedde if thou be comen of free./If thou be of thral born, I geve thee gold and fee./Thou schalte be my lemman so longe as it schal bee."⁵² This desire for Margaret once more emerges from the fact that he admires her "for her fayre bewté."⁵³ Both versions feature a similar sexualization of Margaret's torture by Olibrius,⁵⁴ and even after the extensive tortures that Margaret is put through, the CCC version Olibrius asks prior to Margaret's execution – perhaps somewhat shocked – "And will you still not love me?"⁵⁵

Finally, Codex Ashmole 61⁵⁶ (Ashmole version), though based upon a version of the Stanzaic *Life*, contains an interesting shift in the character of Olibrius. These delightful dissimilarities between the

Ashmole version's Olibrius and previous Stanzaic *Life's Olibrius* will warrant a closer treatment of the text. In the beginning of the Ashmole version, Olibrius is described as:

A nobull man of grete cunnyng...
Also he servyd dey and nyght
Hys fals godys, I you behyght.
He servyd ever the devyll of helle,
And Crystine pepull he dyd quelle⁵⁷

Just as in the Stanzaic *Life* and the CCC version, Olibrius has clear demonic associations. While there is no indication of a “familial association” between Olibrius and the Devil, Olibrius is the one who “servyd ever the devyll of helle.”

Moreover, unlike the previous versions, not only does Olibrius serve the Devil, but demons also serve him in return! After Margaret's torture, she is once again confined to her prison cell and attacked by the dragon, after which she looks up to find her other demonic opponent, a “fouler best”⁵⁸ (fouler beast) still. While Margaret's narratives frequently create an association between this second demon and the threat to Margaret's virginity,⁵⁹ the specific connection that the demon draws is quite startling. As the demon begins an explanation of his presence, he confides to Margaret:

In dragons wyse we com to thee
To spyll thi wytte and make thee wode to be.
The kyng, Syr Olybryus,
In this lyknes sent us thus
For to strey thi fare body
With hys craft and nygramansy.⁶⁰

While in previous versions Olibrius and the demons in Margaret's cell are associated via metaphor and Margaret's speech; in the Ashmole version, Margaret's demons appear in her cell at the behest of Olibrius who commands them through “hys craft and nygramansy” – no doubt the origin of the author's earlier assertion the Olibrius was a man “of grete cunnyng.” Specifically, they have been commanded to “spyll thi wytte and make thee wode to be,” a phrase that means something akin to “deprive you of your mind and drive you insane.” However, the nature of this insanity is left open, and Richard Kieckhefer has noted that while necromancy could be put to many uses “erotic purposes were among the most prominent.”⁶¹ Moreover, necromancy used for erotic ends was frequently conceived as driving the victim out of their right mind: Hincmar of Reims (9th century) recounts a tale in which a young woman is tortured by demons until she capitulates to their master's desires; a Dutch manuscript recounts that the target of a particular spell will be “tormented by the conjured spirits, and will be

unable to rest or do anything else until she yields;" while a 15th-century German manual includes the incantation "so may the love of N. be fixed on N., so that she will burn with love of me and not be able to sleep, wake, lie down, sit or walk without burning for love of me," with the end result being that the woman will "wail, lament, beat her breast, and so forth, until she succumbs."⁶²

The demon also suggests that he and his brother have been sent to "strey thi fare body." The word *strey* (from *stroien*) is often taken to mean destroy.⁶³ However, I would like to point out that this runs counter to both Olibrius' purpose (he has other plans for her body) and his abilities (surely he is capable of destroying her body, as he has shown through his tortures, without resorting to demons). Furthermore, when Margaret emerges from the prison cell after her debacle with demons, Olibrius once more begs her "Meyd Margaret, I pray thee/that thou wyll turne unto me," clearly indicating to the audience that his desire for her flesh has not abated. Rather, it seems more likely that *strey* should be read with one of its other valences: to conquer, subdue, overcome, or violate. In this sense, the demons have been sent to drive Margaret mad with lust and violate her body, the same goal that their commander Olibrius has.

Nor is this the only instance of Olibrius' carnal longing in the Ashmole version. During Margaret's torture, she tells Olibrius:

My lord to me he is full kynd;
He schall never go out of my mynd.
If thi hope were of my flessche
To do thi wyll both herd and nessche,
To rente the flessch fro the bone,
Power of my saule getys thou non.⁶⁴

In these six lines, the author skillfully merges Olibrius' desires with his tortures. While Margaret is clearly claiming that she will be faithful to God despite Olibrius' tortures, these same tortures are also sexualized by suggesting that Olibrius' desire is "of my flessche/to do thi wyll both herd and nessche." As the editor of Ashmole 61 notes, "both herd and nessche" literally means "both hard and soft," but can also convey the meaning of "in every way." Thus, while Margaret's dialogue eventually leads into the idea of torture ("To rente the flessch fro the bone"), it is also a rejection of Olibrius' sexual desire to do his will in every way (both hard and soft) with her body.

Synthesis

In each of the *Lives* under consideration, there is a strong connection between Olibrius' sexual desire and the demonic. In the Paris, Nero,

and Tiberius versions, the authors draw connections between the demonic dragon in Margaret's cell and the character of Olibrius. In the CCC version and the Stanzaic *Life*, Olibrius' desire is no longer connected to the dragon in the cell but with the diabolic in general, with Margaret even going so far as to address Olibrius as a child or nephew of the Devil. Finally, the Ashmole version introduces a curious twist to the familiar narrative in which Olibrius no longer merely serves the Devil but has other demons that he uses in his attempts to bend Margaret to his will, once more linking him to the demonic opponents in Margaret's cell.

While this analysis offers an expanded understanding of the character of Olibrius, it is far more interesting for the ramifications upon Margaret's readers. As I previously pointed out, there is a larger narrative context at work, a transhistorical narrative in which Margaret represents the Christian community and Olibrius an "un-Christian" one. Their conflict is a microcosm of the conflict between the two larger communities. As Bly Calkin has noted: "a community requires the existence of outsiders to define itself. Christianity in particular, as a community of worship gathered around suffering, dying bodies, requires an outsider to inscribe that suffering and torment."⁶⁵ Yet, it is not with gladness and good cheer that this suffering is inscribed in St. Margaret: the outsider, both Olibrius, as a character, and the community he represents, is demonized in the process. Thus, it is not just the desires of Olibrius that become driven by demons and un-Christians, it is the desires of the outsider community that Olibrius represents. The message to Margaret's readers is clear: to be like Margaret, one must resist sexual contact with the outside community for their desires are driven by forces that Christians should never come in contact with.

Religious identity

But what outside community does Olibrius represent? I would now like to shift focus for a moment and discuss my use of the term "un-Christian" to describe Olibrius. Many authors working on the various *Lives* have alternatively addressed Olibrius as either a "Roman" or "pagan" prefect. Certainly, this would be historically accurate: the narrative of Margaret's torture and martyrdom is clearly set in a time in which the Christian religion was not a dominant tradition and within the confines of the Roman empire (Antioch). Clayton and Magennis locate the general historical period of the narrative as the persecution under Diocletian and Maximian,⁶⁶ a historical period echoed by Cooper when discussing the Tiberius *Life*.⁶⁷

However, despite what may be a historically accurate assessment, it

is worthy of note that Olibrius is never directly identified as either Roman or pagan in any of the *Lives* under consideration, especially interesting considering a willingness on the part of the redactors to label Margaret's father in such a way: Theodosius, the only other named adversary in the piece, is alternatively addressed as "chief priest of the pagans [who] worshipped idols" in the Paris version, the "patriarch of the heathens" in the Tiberius, and a "heathen king" in the CCC.⁶⁸ Moreover, both Evans and Bly Calkin have located alternate religious groups in the figure of Olibrius in two separate versions of the *Life* (Evans: Judaism in the Katherine Group version;⁶⁹ Bly Calkin: Muslim in the Auchinleck Manuscript version of Margaret).⁷⁰

I would propose that in the versions surveyed, Olibrius' religious identity is fluid and multiple rather than fixed and singular: Olibrius is neither pagan, nor Jew, nor Muslim, instead he is a proximal "un-Christian" other. In this fluidity, Olibrius does not fail to signify a religious identity, rather he symbolizes all potential opponents of Christianity.

In this sense, Olibrius can be thought of as a pattern in the clouds or Rorschach blot on which the viewer can project any enemy that seems appropriate.⁷¹ Yet, some aspects of the picture can be brought into clearer focus by emphasizing some aspects of the text over others or introducing new elements into a familiar version. In so doing, the redactors bring portions of Olibrius' identity into greater focus, thereby making one religious group more dominant among the plurality of "the enemy." Nevertheless, this is never a firm attribution of one religious group over another, allowing Olibrius to consistently suggest an opponent that is most needed at the time of the text's production while retaining his protean identity within the narrative.

Jewish identity

In the Paris and Nero versions of Margaret, Olibrius' identity remains profoundly fluid.⁷² In both texts, we have some suggestion that Olibrius bears markers of a Jewish identity, as seen through Christian eyes. When his soldiers return to tell of Margaret's devotion to Christ, they exclaim "Lord, your power cannot be in common with her, because she does not serve our gods but invokes God, and she worships Christ, whom the Jews crucified."⁷³ When Olibrius comes to Margaret, he then asks "What god do you revere and worship?" to which Margaret responds "I invoke God the omnipotent and his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has kept my virginity unharmed and intact until the present day. I invoke the name of Christ, *whom your fathers crucified* and because of that perished."⁷⁴ Thus, Margaret draws a

direct connection between Olibrius' lineage and the Jews through the medium of the crucifixion. Nevertheless, there is little else in the text which would suggest that Olibrius conforms to a Jewish identity. Both Olibrius and Margaret constantly refer to Olibrius' object of worship as his "gods," such that it seems difficult to ascribe any form of monotheistic impulse to the figure.

Conversely, assertions of Jewishness take on more weight when we come to the Tiberius and CCC versions. In the Tiberius version, as in the Paris and Nero texts, Olibrius is not explicitly identified as a Jew, but Jewishness is attributed to him through the medium of the crucifixion.⁷⁵ However, a peculiar alteration then occurs throughout the entire Tiberius text. Where before the object of Olibrius' devotion is always in the plural, the Tiberius persistently renders this object in the singular: it is not "gods" that Olibrius worships but "god." Perhaps, the most striking thing about this change is the fact that three hands were responsible for copying the Tiberius text, all of whom seemed to accept this persistent singular within the narrative. One of the scribes even frequently edits "*min*" to "*minne*"⁷⁶ but leaves "*god*" in the singular, suggesting that at least one of the editors considered the words surrounding the singular carefully and then passed on. The original author (who may or may not be the original scribe of the Tiberius) seems to be deliberately making Olibrius more monotheistic than his Mombrtius version precursor, something which later editors implicitly agree with.

In the CCC version, Jewishness is once more attributed to Olibrius through the medium of the crucifixion: "I love Almighty God ... it is he whom your ancestors hanged and because of that deed they must perish,"⁷⁷ a phrase that is noticeably different than the other versions due to Margaret's future tense.⁷⁸ As in the Tiberius version, there is also frequent reference to the object of Olibrius' worship in the singular form. For example, when Olibrius approaches Margaret prior to her first tortures he demands that Margaret "have pity on your fair body and pray to my god."⁷⁹ Yet, Olibrius sometimes changes from singular to plural in the same monologue, as he does in his first threat to Margaret: "If you will not pray to my god, my sword shall cut your fair body to pieces ... And if you would love me and pray to my gods, then it should be as well for you as for me."⁸⁰ Finally, it is difficult for Margaret's statement to Olibrius "You do your father's work, who is the Devil himself"⁸¹ not to be read as a distorted reflection of John 8:44,⁸² a passage that becomes one of the most virulent anti-Semitic sayings from the New Testament.

While Jewishness is a feature of Olibrius' identity in each text, it is by no means his only identity: all four versions also engage a pagan identity as well when they describe Olibrius worshipping his "deaf

and dumb” idols. Although the Jewish identity is certainly more pronounced in the CCC version and Tiberius versions, this Jewish identity never fully eclipses Olibrius’ pagan identity. As a result, Olibrius maintains a hybrid identity of the most un-Christian traits (Christ-killing and idol worship), the polar opposite of Margaret’s Christian identity.

Saracen identity

Skipping forward approximately a century, the Stanzaic *Life* and Ashmole versions seem to favor the introduction of a new Saracen identity for Olibrius over the old Jewish and pagan identities. In the Stanzaic *Life*, Olibrius is identified as a Saracen when he first encounters Margaret:⁸³

For to dystroye Crysten peple he hastyd hym belyve.
He sawe Mayde Margarete the schepe before her dryve.
Sone sayd that Sarasyne he wolde have her to wyfe:
“Goo, summe of my men, and brynge her me belyve.
“Bye my lay, if sche be comen of kynrede free,
Of alle women that I knowe beste thanne schalle sche be.
“For her fayre bewté, if sche be come of thral,
By Mahound, her maryage schalle sche not lese alle.
Fulle fayre I wyll her clothen, in purpylle and in palle;
Sche schal be my lemman, I telle you nowe alle.”⁸⁴

Not only does the author describe Olibrius as a “Sarasyne” but also as a worshipper of “Mahound,” a Middle English version of the prophet Muhammad’s name. Moreover, Olibrius’ servants are frequently addressed as Saracens as well,⁸⁵ and the author lays a general curse over all members of the religious group when he declares “Icursed be thi Saryssones! God geve hem yvel endynge.”⁸⁶

Beyond these direct attributions, the Olibrius of the Stanzaic *Life* also bears other markers of Saracen identity. In the beginning of the Stanzaic *Life*, Olibrius is described as a lord “Of Asye and Antioche, to geven and to selle.”⁸⁷ Bly Calkin has noted that “the crusader’s capture of Antioch in 1098 after a seven-month siege was well known in the West not only through various chronicles but also through the circulation of the crusading cycle, the *Chanson d’Antioche*.”⁸⁸ Similarly, even before the spread of the Ottoman Empire, theologians such as the Venerable Bede⁸⁹ and Peter of Cluny⁹⁰ located the Saracen in Asia. Moreover, while nearly all of the Olibrii in previous versions attempt to sway Margaret through the possibility of wealth and riches,⁹¹ the Stanzaic *Life* fixates upon the incredible (possibly, obscene) wealth that Olibrius can bestow upon Margaret:

“By Mahound, her maryage schalle sche not lese alle.
Fulle fayre I wyll her clothen, in purpylle and in palle”⁹²

...

Truste on me and be my wyfe – fulle welle than thou schalte spede.
Antioche and Asye thou schalte have to mede;
Syclaton, purpel and palle, that schalle be thi wede;
With the beste metys of the londe we schalle thee norryse and feede.⁹³

...

He sayde to mayde Margarete, “Haste thou turned thi othe?
Beleve on my goddys too, I geve thee bothe golde and clothe,
And if thou wylte not do soo, thi lyfe it schalle be fulle loth.”⁹⁴

Thus, while previous Olibrii hint at the wealth they could offer Margaret, the Olibrius of the Stanzaic *Life* attempts to ply Margaret with fine clothes, gold, silk, the “best metys that is in lond” (the finest foods), and the wealth of all of Asia and Antioch. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has noted that “the superabundant wealth, plentiful luxuries, and hedonism of the Saracens were medieval commonplaces,”⁹⁵ and that such wealth, treasures, and banquets were common tropes in descriptions and stories involving Saracens.

The Ashmole version features similar suggestions of a Saracen identity for Olibrius. A direct attribution of “Saracen-hood” is evident in the Ashmole version when Olibrius first spies Margaret:

Anon he commandyd a knyght
To bryng hyr to hym anon ryght.
The knyght wente anon hyr to
And seyde that sche must with hym go.
The meyden was so myld of chere
Answerd hym as ye schall here,
And seyde sche hade nothing to do
Oute of that ground with hym to go.
Sche prayd hym of hys curtassye
To pase hys wey and late hyr be.
And shortly this tale to telle,
He went away fro that damselle
And com to Olybrius the kyng
And told hym all that tyding,
That sche wold for nothing
Cum to hym; sche ne wold
Bot thei with hyr stryve schuld.
To Jhesu Cryst gan sche calle,
That sofyrd deth for us alle,
That he wold hyr defend
That no Saryzen schuld hyr schend,
And besought hym of hys grace
Hyr to socour in every place,
And seyde, “For thi luffe, Lord, wyll I dyghe,
And forsoke all werldly compenye.”⁹⁶

When Margaret is first approached by Olibrius’ knights, she rejects

their demands for her to accompany them. As the knights leave Margaret to confer with Olibrius, she prays that “no Saryzen schuld hyr schend” (that no Saracen should harm/dishonor her). This prayer is not a prayer against the knights who wish Margaret no ill will on their first venture, rather it is a preview of the harm that Olibrius will inflict upon her and the “dishonor” that he wishes for her. Thus, the Saracen of the prayer must be interpreted as Olibrius.

The Ashmole version also contains other details that seem to support this Saracen identity. Olibrius is described variously as a king over “all Azy” and having land “fro Antyoch to Azye.” Unlike the *Stanzaic Life*, by the time of the *Ashmole Life*’s composition (c.1450), the Ottoman Empire would have stood as a bastion in the east, strengthening the previously mentioned attributions by Bede and Peter of Cluny for imagining the “Saracen threat” in “Azye.”

The Ashmole version also contains the same focus on wealth and riches as the previously analyzed *Stanzaic Life*:

“If thou be born fre,
For soth my leman schall thou be.
I wyll have thee to my wyfe,
To lyve in joy all thi lyve.
Gold and ryches I wyll thee gyffe
All the whyll that thou dost lyve.”
...
Trow on me and be my wyve,
And lyve in joy all thi lyve.
Antyoche and all Azye
After my deth I gyve to thee.
Sylke and gold and purpull paule,
And I wyll thee wed, were thou schalle,
Welle furryd with ryche ermyn –
In all this werld is non so fyne.
And with the beste metys that is in lond
I schall thee fede, I understand,⁹⁷

Once more, as in the *Stanzaic Life*, the *Ashmole Olibrius* plies Margaret with gold, silk, land, rich purple cloth, ermine, and the “best metys that is in lond.”

However, just as in the previous versions surveyed, these associations between Olibrius and a particular ethnic/religious group are rendered opaque by other elements of the narrative. The *Stanzaic Life* once more makes mention of the multiplicity of Olibrius’ gods,⁹⁸ and Margaret implies through her statement “Thye goddys ... ar made of stoon”⁹⁹ that Olibrius worships idols. Furthermore, Olibrius’ frequent use of “goddys” and Margaret’s accusation of idol worship serve to align Olibrius with Margaret’s father who “beleved in false goddys that were with hondys wroghte” and is a “patryarke” (pagan priest).¹⁰⁰ All of these attributions serve to blend distinctly pagan

elements into Olibrius' Saracen identity.

The Ashmole version engages in this blending to an even greater degree. Once more, the Ashmole version engages pagan attributions. Shortly after Margaret's prayer, Olibrius prays "sche shall upon my godys beleve/Or else sore I schall hyr greve,"¹⁰¹ once more associating Olibrius with polytheistic pagan practices.¹⁰²

Perhaps more interesting, the manifestation of the Christ-killing trope later in the Ashmole version seems to also point to Jewish associations found in previous versions:

Than anon to hyr he seyde,
"We dyd Jhesu Cryst to dede
And dyd hym streyn upon the rode
Tyll he suet water and blode,
And crownyd with a croune of thorn:
And thou leve on hym, thou arte lorn."¹⁰³

Yet, even this assertion from Olibrius that "we" killed Christ is opaque: Anidjar (2003) notes that the boundaries between Jewishness and Arabness were frequently collapsed together and that from "the 8th century on, Christian writers would begin to refer to Muslims as being 'new Jews' or 'consistently characterize Islamic belief and practice as Jewish, or at least as Jewishly influenced.'"¹⁰⁴ This even extended to artistic representations of the passion whose representation in the 12th and 13th centuries occasionally featured "hideously deformed and dark-skinned Saracens alongside the usual Jews."¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Muslims were not free of associations between themselves and pagans: John Tolan has frequently called attention in his work to the representation of Saracens as idol worshippers and beholden to multiple gods in the Christian imagination.¹⁰⁶ Of course, the very fact that Pagans, Jews, and Muslims can be categorically collapsed together, vitiates the very possibility of separating them within the narrative context. Once more, and for a final time, Olibrius' identity remains decidedly "un-Christian."

Conclusion

The portrait that I have drawn of Olibrius in this chapter is at once one-dimensional and multivalent. On the one hand, Olibrius' identity only serves the purposes of Margaret's narrative. His character exists only as a rejection of Margaret's: where Margaret is sex-negative, Olibrius is sex-positive; where Margaret is Christian, Olibrius is un-Christian both through his association with demonic traits and those of opposing religious groups. This opposite polarity makes Olibrius an opponent who can never be reasoned with and never be redeemed: a

straw man guided by demonic desires that the martyr strikes down again and again.

At the same time, the narratives' treatment of Olibrius offers an interesting lens through which to view medieval Christian perceptions of proximal religious groups. In the earlier Latin versions of the *Life*, Olibrius is a character without a distinct pagan or Jewish identity. Both the Paris and the Nero text depict Olibrius as something of a hybrid between the two religious groups, not only worshipping multiple gods and idols, but also taking the role of Christ-killer normally reserved for the Jews in medieval Christian theology.

Conversely, the 11th- and 12th-century Old English versions begin to leave this pagan context behind (although it is never completely eliminated). The Olibrius of these versions becomes startlingly more Jewish than his Latin predecessors, worshipping only one God and engaging anti-Jewish sentiment from the New Testament. Unfortunately, given the unclear origins of these Old English variants,¹⁰⁷ it is difficult to say with any accuracy what the reasons behind this shift may be.¹⁰⁸

Unlike the shift in Jewishness in the Tiberius and CCC versions, the introduction of Saracen elements was likely precipitated by the influence of Romantic literature and poetry on the narrative.¹⁰⁹ Saracens are a frequent addition to romantic literature, particularly those that deal with subject matter pertaining to the crusades.¹¹⁰ In *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England*, Dorothy Metlitzki notes that there are four archetypal roles for the Saracen character in medieval romances: "the enamored Muslim princess; the converted Saracen; the defeated emir or sultan; and the archetypal Saracen giant whom the Christian hero overpowers and kills."¹¹¹

Not surprisingly, the Saracen Olibrius of both Middle English *Lives* shares much in common with the figure of the defeated sultan. For example, the sultan in the *Sowdone of Babylone* serves much the same role as Olibrius does in both *Lives*: "an emotionally satisfying caricature of an exotic and fundamentally incomprehensible enemy alien whose defeat and humiliation is the fervently desired happy ending of the tale."¹¹² The sultan also displays the enormous wealth that the *Lives* attribute to Olibrius when he sets sail on an extravagantly appointed ship overflowing with riches.¹¹³ Finally, when he is defeated by Charlemagne and his twelve Peers – despite frequently cursing his own gods for his defeat and claiming he will no longer believe in them¹¹⁴ – he refuses to convert to Christianity when given the opportunity,¹¹⁵ mirroring Olibrius' refusal to accept Margaret's Christian doctrine even in the face of the miracles she performs.

More generally, Olibrius captures the general category of the

Saracen enemy, frequently also described in “un-Christian” terms. In *The High Book of the Grail*, Sir Gawain comes upon three maidens bearing the heads of 150 knights, “some of them sealed with gold, some with silver and others with lead.”¹¹⁶ When he inquires as to the meaning of the grisly tokens, he is told that the gold heads are Christians of the “New Law,” the silver heads are those of Jews (“the Old Law”), and “the heads sealed in lead the false law of the Saracens.”¹¹⁷ The priest who reveals this information likewise declares “Of these three kinds of men is the world composed,”¹¹⁸ establishing a context whereby the signifiers New and Old Law pertain to Christians and Jews and heathen to Saracens.¹¹⁹ *Guy of Warwick* offers a similar binary picture of Christian/Saracen when Guy “defines himself as one of the *cristen men*, who have God’s grace, in opposition to the *mis-bileued* Saracens,”¹²⁰ once more creating opposing poles in which Christians represent truth and Saracens, falsehood. Similarly, the 13th-century *The Quest of the Holy Grail* features the slaughter of the knights of Castle Carcelois by Galahad, Perceval, and Bors. As the three knights contemplate whether their act was just, a priest comes to confirm the righteousness of the slaughter since knights behaved “worse than Saracens. All their actions went against God and the Holy Church ... the Saracens themselves would not have behaved worse.”¹²¹ Galahad, Perceval and Bors – the Christian pole – are righteous because they have defeated the knights of Castle Carcelois who are so evil that they exceeded the Saracens – the normally opposing pole.

The addition of Saracens to the narrative also suggests a shift in audience. Broadly speaking, the audience for the Latin and Old English versions was likely a religious or lay audience who engaged with the *Life* for religious edification.¹²² Conversely, the poetic rhyming, inclusion of romantic tropes and comparatively faster pace of the narrative suggest that the Stanzaic *Life* was likely written for entertainment and appealed to the same audience as other romantic literature.¹²³ While this was no doubt true of the Ashmole version as well, Shuffelton points out that the inclusion of additional information regarding Margaret’s education by her nurse¹²⁴ suggests that the text may have been used for instructive purposes.¹²⁵ This seems a strong likelihood given the varied contents of the manuscript, all of which might have been put to the twin uses of play and pedagogy.¹²⁶

These religious caricatures and the demonic sexuality previously discussed combine to reinforce and solidify sexual boundaries between Christians and proximal religious groups, boundaries which were already present in England as well as the rest of medieval Europe.¹²⁷ Moreover, it would have stressed the demonic stereotypes associated with each group, associations that were never far from the medieval

imagination.¹²⁸ In so doing, the versions of the *Lives* under consideration would have reinforced Christian sexuality identity against the transgressions of the “other” for centuries.

Moreover, this frequent “updating” of Olibrius’ character once more reinforces a sense of the perpetual present in the narrative. Both the Cotton Tiberius A.iii manuscript and the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 manuscript – both of which feature a “more Jewish” Olibrius – were likely copied during times in which Jews had an actual presence in England (that is, between the Norman Conquest of 1066 and the Edict of Expulsion in 1290). Similarly, the introduction of Saracen elements found in the Stanzaic *Life* and the Ashmole *Life* came about during a period of time in which England was overtaken by a crusading fervor, a fervor which identified Saracens as the enemy of Christendom. Through these alterations to the character, Olibrius does not remain a 4th-century Roman rule, but instead becomes the proximal religious other that was “closest”¹²⁹ and most feared by the intended readers of each text.

In conclusion, the narrative of Margaret and Olibrius in the English versions of the *Life* should not be read as simply an encounter between a pagan prefect and a virgin martyr. Rather, it is the encounter of the wholly Christian with the wholly “un-Christian,” a meeting between the insider and the outsider. Within the structure of this larger narrative, Margaret becomes capable not only of rebuffing Olibrius’ advances, but of solidifying the sexual boundaries of her readers against those outside the Christian community, an apotropaic ward against transgression by outsiders.

By way of wrapping up the first four chapters, each of the monsters that Margaret faces contributes to an *imitatio* that informed the sexuality of her readers. The dragon is a polysemous symbol of both Margaret’s enduring virginity and her succumbing to sexuality, a symbol that could inform both the sexual identity of virgins and mothers equally. The black demon was used by selective redactors to inscribe boundaries and borders for acceptable sexual practice among their readers, both to encourage desired identity markers (chaste abstention from sexual activity) and condemn negative ones (sex with animals and adultery). The characterization of Olibrius further constricts lay sexual identity to reject the transgression of proximal religious practitioners such as Jews and Muslims into its borders.

For my final chapter, I return to Margaret’s dragon and offer a further analysis of what is arguably Margaret’s most important blessing: the safe delivery of healthy children and the survival of women in labor.¹³⁰ I then expand the claims that I made in my first chapter regarding the importance of Margaret’s dragon to pregnant women. My analysis will feature a close reading of Margaret’s prayers,

the written record of Margaret's offer of aid to women and their children. Using evidence gleaned in this analysis, I will then map Margaret's experience onto the medieval birthing experience of the lying-in room.

Notes

- 1 Maud Burnett McNerney, "Rhetoric, Power, and Integrity in the Passion of the Virgin Martyr," in *Menacing Virgins*, ed. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (London: Associated University Press, 1999), 51–52.
- 2 Elaine Treharne, "A Note on the Sensational Old English Life of St Margaret," in *Saints and Scholars: New Perspectives on Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture in Honour of Hugh Magennis*, ed. Stuart McWilliams (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), 9.
- 3 Aviad Kleinberg, *Flesh Made Word: Saints' Stories and the Western Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 275.
- 4 Tracey-Anne Cooper, "Why Is Margaret's the Only Life in London, BL, Cotton MS Tiberius A.Iii?," in *Writing Women Saints in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 71.
- 5 As Schulenburg does when discussing the narrative in general (Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca. 500–1100* [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 230); McNerney in her discussion of *Seinte Margarete* ("Rhetoric, Power, and Integrity," 51); Larson in her discussion of the Mombritius version (Wendy R. Larson, "Who Is the Master of This Narrative?: Maternal Patronage of the Cult of St. Margaret," in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003], 96); and by Clayton and Magennis while discussing the general structure of the narrative (Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 28).
- 6 As Shuffelton does in his discussion of the Mombritius version (George Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse* [Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008], 570); Sanok's frequent use of the term "pagan" to describe the context of Bokenham's *Life* (Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007], 64).
- 7 Clayton and Magennis locate the general historical period of the narrative as some time during the persecution under Diocletian and Maximian at which time Romans would have been the primary opponent of Christians (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 3).
- 8 Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 141–143.
- 9 Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, 166.
- 10 Ruth Evans, "The Jew, the Host and the Virgin Martyr: Fantasies of the Sentient Body," in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Sarah Salih, Anke Bernau, and Ruth Evans (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 172.
- 11 I use the terms "sex-negative" and "sex-positive" as there is no extant term that appropriately designates the opposite of "virginal." Just as Margaret's sex role in the story is predicated on the fact that she must never have sex (sex-negative), Olibrius' role in the story is predicated on the fact that he will not cease his aggressions until he has sex (sex-positive).

- 12 Particularly the dragon, a fact which serves to strengthen the sexually threatening nature of Olibrius' character.
- 13 Both "Rhetoric, Power, and Integrity" and its later refinement in Maud Burnett McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins: From Thecla to Joan of Arc* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).
- 14 Namely, the destruction of Margaret's virginity and thus, her future sainthood.
- 15 "A small collection containing a *uita* of St. Christopher, an account of the Invention of the Cross and the *uitae* of SS Margaret and Juliana" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 95).
- 16 Both the attribution and date are based on the Paris manuscript's similarity to London, BL Royal 5.F.III (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 95–96).
- 17 In particular, the versions under consideration fall into thematic groups based on how they treat Olibrius and his relation to the demonic: The Lives in the Paris version, BL Cotton Nero E.1, and BL Cotton Tiberius A.iii create associations between Olibrius and the dragon in Margaret's cell; the CCC version and Stanzaic Life paint Olibrius with a general demonic brush as well as drawing familial connections between himself and Satan; and the Ashmole version styles Olibrius as something of a "Duke of Hell" bending knee to Satan but commanding demons of his own at the same time through necromantic means.
- 18 "*transiret Olibrius prefectus de Asia in Antiochiam ciuitatem persequere Christianos et deos suos uanos adorare suaderet; et ubi audierat aliquos Christum nominare, statimque eos ferreis nexibus constringebat*" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 196).
- 19 "*statim concupiuit eam*" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 196).
- 20 "Go quickly and seize that girl. If she is free, I will take her as my wife. If she is a slave, I will purchase her and she will be my concubine. It will be good for her in my home due to her beauty."
Ite festinanter, comprehendite hanc puellam. Si est libera, accipiam eam mihi uxorem. Si ancilla est, dabo pretium pro ea et erit mihi concubina. Bene erit ei in domo mea propter puchritudinem eius" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 196).
- 21 "*Domine, potestas tua non potest ei esse communis, quia non est seruiens diis nostris sed Deum inuocabat, et Christum quem Iudei crucifixerunt adorabat*" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 196).
- 22 "*Ex qua genere es tu? Enarra mihi. Es libera an ancilla?*" Beata Margareta respondit, '*Libera sum et Christiana.*' ... Prefectus dixit, '*Quem deum colis uel quem adoras?*' Sancta Margareta respondit, '*Ego inuoco Deum omnipotentem et Filium eius Dominum Iesum Christum, qui meam uirginitatem usque in presentem diem inlesam atque inuiolatam custodiuit*' (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 196–198).
- 23 "*in carcerem recludi donec inueniret per qualem machinationem uirginitatem eius perderet*" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives*, 198).
- 24 "*Deum omnipotentem et Filium eius Dominum Iesum Christum, qui meam uirginitatem usque in presentem diem inlesam atque inuiolatam custodiuit*" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives*, 198).
- 25 "*miserere corporis tui pulchritudini et teneritati tuae. Magis autem consente mihi et adhora deos meos, et multam tibi dabo pecuniam et bene tibi erit super omnem familiam meam*" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives*, 198).
- 26 "*Si non adoraueris deos meos, gladius meus deuorabit carnem tuam et ossa tua disperdam super ignem ardentem. Nam etsi obedieris mihi et adoraueris deos meos*

et corpus tuum copularis mihi in amorem, ecce ante omnes tibi dico, ego accipiam te ad coniugium et bene tibi erit sicut et mihi" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 198).

- 27 "O Margaret, truly we grieve for you, because we see you nude, lacerated, and your body tormented. O Margaret, what beauty you have ruined because of your unbelief! That prefect is angry at you and he hastens to destroy you and remove the memory of you. Believe in his gods and you will live!"

O Margareta, uere dolemus te, quia uidimus te nudam lacerari et corpus tuum macerari. O Margareta, qualem decorem perdidisti propter incredulitatem tuam! Iste prefectus tibi iracundus est et perdere te festinat et delere memoriam tuam. Crede deos suos et uiuas" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 200).

- 28 "Tu facis opera Satane" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 200).

- 29 "O orribilis, O insatiabilis leo, abominatus a Domino, confusus a Christo" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 200).

- 30 "Salua me ex ore leonis et a cornibus unicornuorum humilitatem meam" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 202).

- 31 "gladius meus deuorabit carnem tuam, et ossa tua diserdam" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 202).

- 32 "gladius utraque parte acutus in manu eius uidebatur" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 204).

- 33 "facta est ut herba pallida et formido mortis cecidit in eam et confringebantur omnia ossa eius" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 204).

- 34 *The Life of St. Anthony* also addresses the devil as "roaring like a lion" (*ut leo rugiens*; chapter 7) and the demonic host that appears before Anthony as "replete with images of lions" (*repleuere phantasiis leonum*; chapter 9).

- 35 The Cotton Nero E.1 manuscript is a large collection of Saints' Lives that has been dated to c.1000 – though the Margaret material is "a later addition" (Juliana Dresvina, *A Maid with a Dragon: The Cult of St Margaret of Antioch in Medieval England* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016], 207), and the work is attributed to Worcester (Ludwig Bieler, *Codices Patriciani Latini: A Descriptive Catalogue of Latin Manuscripts Relating to St. Patrick* [Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1942], 2). The version of St. Margaret is found in pars 2 of the manuscript (the manuscript is divided into two separate codexes) starting on p. 162v (368 of the whole; entitled *Vita sanctae Margaretae Antiochenae*) and running until 165r, and the text is one of several later additions to the manuscript written in a different hand. This later addition appears to be a quire that was added after the surrounding manuscript was written.

The Tiberius manuscript is a collection of texts dated to the middle of the 11th century and assigned to Christ Church, Canterbury "because its contents [see below] agree closely with those of a manuscript described in the medieval catalogue of Christ Church and because several of the saints invoked in its litany were culted at Christ Church" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 84). The manuscript was copied by five different scribes, three of whom worked on the version of Margaret in the manuscript. The version itself is located on fols. 73v-77v and is the only saint's life present in the manuscript. Cooper has argued that this is because the Tiberius version "served two allied functions: first, it formed part of a practical and simple catechism for the laity in which only one exemplary *Life* was required; and second, it inspired the monks of Christ Church to perform their duties in imitation of Margaret's commitment to virginity, devotion to the Cross, and

facilitation of the salvation of others” (Cooper, “Why is Margaret’s the Only Life,” 81). The contents of the Tiberius A.iii manuscript are quite varied and include (in their original order prior to rebinding) “the *Regula S. Benedicti*, with an Old English gloss; supplements to the *Regula*, most of which are glossed; the *Regularis concordia*, again with an Old English gloss; collections of prognostics, short notes, prayers and devotions; Ælfric’s *Colloquy* and his *De temporibus anni*; the Margaret *passio*; Ælfric’s Palm Sunday homily; a Sunday Letter; some short homilies, the *ordo* for the ordination of a bishop, directions for confessors, a text on monastic sign language, a lapidary, part of one of Ælfric’s pastoral letters and an Office of the Virgin (of which the litany forms part)” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 84–85).

- 36 Nero: “If you will not adore my gods, my sword will dominate your flesh.”
“Si non adoraveris deos meos, gladius meus dominabitur carnum tue” (f. 163r)
Tiberius: “My sword will explore your body.”
“min swurd sceal fandian þines lichaman” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 116).
- 37 “þu ungeþunggena hund, and þu ungefylledlican dracan” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 118). Clayton and Magennis note that “and þu ungefylledlican dracan” was crossed out by a later editor for unknown reasons. They suggest it may be that the construction is grammatically unsound (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 141) or that it may have been deemed too confusing following as closely as it does on the appearance of the actual dragon in Margaret’s cell (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 88).
- 38 “Salva me ex ore leonis et a cornibus unicornuorum humilitatem meam” (f. 163r).
- 39 “totus deauratus capilli et barbe eius auree. Videbantur dentes ei ferrei, oculi eius ut Margarita splendebant. Et de naribus ignis et fumus egrediebantur. Lingua ei anhelabat super collum eius. Erat serpens quasi gladius candens et fetore faciebat in carcere. Et erexit se in medio carceris et sibilavit fortiter et factum est lumen in carcere ab igne qui exibat de ore leonis” (f. 163v).
- 40 “Ego quidem misi fratrem meum Rufonem in similitudine draconis ut absorberet te et tolleret memoriam tuam de terra et obrueret virginitatem tuam et perderet decorem tuum” (f. 163v).
- 41 “Iste prefectus iratus est valde et perdere te festinat et delere de terra memoriam tuam” (f. 163r).
- 42 Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 is a collection of homilies and saints’ lives literature drawn primarily from Ælfric. The *Life of St. Margaret* contained within is one of three unique saints’ homilies that are not part of Ælfric’s corpus, the others being the *Life of St. Giles* and the *Life of St. Nicholas* (Mary Richards, “Texts and Their Traditions in the Medieval Library of Rochester Cathedral Priory,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 78, no. 3 (1988): 90). The Old English manuscript is plain with little ornamentation and was the work of three scribes (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 92–93). N.R. Ker’s *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* places the text in Rochester based on the “prickly” script associated with the location, and the relationship between CCC version and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 162 (also likely from Rochester) suggests that the two compilers had access to similar materials (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 93). Richards has suggested that the manuscript dates from the first half of the 12th century (Richards, “Texts and Their Traditions,” 90), while Treharne amends this date to c.1150 for unclear reasons, citing Richards’ work on the dating. Although the footnote is unclear, this may be part of the findings that “now require modification” (Treharne, “A

Note on the Sensational Old English Life of St Margaret,” 5 fn. 2).

- 43 The Stanzaic Life of Margaret refers to a set of very similar poetic versions of Margaret’s *Life* that date from the second half of the 13th century onward. The version of the Stanzaic Life under consideration here is found in Cambridge University Library MS Addit. 4122 (~15th century) and was edited by Sherry Reames in *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*. Other Stanzaic Lives are found in the Auchinleck Manuscript (National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.2.1); Blackburn, Public Library MS (formerly Petworth 3); Bodleian Library MS Bodley 779; Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson poet. 34; and Trinity College, Cambridge MS 323 (Sherry L. Reames, *Middle English Legends of Women Saints* [Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003], 128).

- 44 “And se deofol him þa abalhc and þa fæmne forswelgan wolde. And seo eadiga fæmne sona mid hire swiðre hand wið þonu sceocca wel gebletsode and on hire forhæfde rodetacna mærcode and swa wið pone draca wel generode. And seo eadiga fæmne hal and gesund fram him gewænte. And eall sticmælum toðwan se draca ut of þan carcerne, and hi nan yfel on hire ne gefelde” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 162). It is interesting to note that the CCC version author seems just as intent as the author of the Katherine Group version (see [Chapter 2](#)) to assure his audience that Margaret emerges from her ordeal physical and (possibly) sexually unscathed. Nevertheless, Margaret’s lack of contact with the dragon does not seem to diminish the implied sexual threat of the dragon’s presence. When Margaret first begins to beat the black demon in CCC version, she shouts “Stop, you miserable creature, you cannot seduce my virginity from me.”

“Geswic þu earming, ne miht þu to nahte minne meagþhad me to beswicenne” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 162–164).

- 45 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 121–122.

- 46 “þæt deofle mine sawle ne beswican” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 154). The verb *beswican* is the same verb that accompanies Margaret’s defiance about her virginity to the black demon.

- 47 “Ðu wyrcest þines fæðeres weorc, þæt is se deofol self” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 160). In the manuscript, it is actually Olibrius who speaks the line. However, Clayton and Magennis argue that this is likely a translation error on the part of the scribe who first rendered the Latin into Old English: “The corresponding speech in the Latin is spoken by Margaret and is introduced by the phrase ‘Et dixit praeffecto:’ here the grammatical case of the word *praeffecto* lies at the root of the discrepancy” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 62). Similar errors are also present in the text including Margaret’s odd comment that Olibrius will go to hell if she submits to him and the reference to two “lands” of Jamnes and Mambres held by Satan (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 62–63).

- 48 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 116.

- 49 Reames notes that the use of the term “foule gostys” is specific to the Cambridge University Library MS Addit. 4122 version of the Stanzaic Life and “suggests the demonic nature of Margaret’s enemies. The other MSS just refer to them again as Saracens” (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 129).

- 50 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 119.

- 51 Though seemingly an odd choice on the part of the redactor, this may be an attempt to couch their relationship as literally nepotistic.

- 52 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 118.

- 53 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 116.

- 54 In the Stanzaic Life, Olibrius pleads that Margaret “have mercye on thi whyte

flesshe” (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 119) and the townspeople “fulle sorye that they were/Of that maydens whyte flesshe and of her yelowre here” (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 120).

The CCC version features a similar scene among the townsfolk, in which they claim “we all sorely grieve for you, because we see you sitting naked like this and your beautiful body made into a wonder.”

“ealle we þe bemænað sarlice, forþon þe we feseoð þe swa nacode sitan and þinne fægra lichaman to wundre macian” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 158). There is perhaps a bit of a play on words here, for the crowd – unbeknownst to them – are indeed witnessing a “wonder” or a “miracle” in the making.

55 “And nylt þu me get lufian...” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 166).

56 The codex itself is a large collection of writings that can be dated to c.1500 based on watermarks (Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole* 61, 2–3), and the language of the verses contained within is Middle English. Several items contain the name of a scribe named “Rate” (typically in the format “Amen Quod Rate”), but little is known about this person save that his or her dialect seems to originate in northeast Leicestershire (Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole* 61, 4). The *Life of St. Margaret* contained within Codex Ashmole is one such production of Rate, likely produced in the middle of the 15th century and based upon an earlier stanzaic version that is indebted to the Mombricitus (Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole* 61, 570). The contents of the manuscript are varied and include romances (e.g., *Sir Cleges*, *Sir Isumbras*, and *The Erle of Tolous*); Saints’ Lives (e.g., *Saint Eustace*, *Saint Margaret*, and *The Legend of the Resurrection*); Exempla (e.g., *The Knight Who Forgave His Father’s Slayer*, *The Jealous Wife* and *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire*); Didactic works (e.g., *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, and *Dame Courtesy*); as well as prayers and meditations.

57 Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole* 61, 373.

58 Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole* 61, 379.

59 In previous versions, Margaret dashes the demon to the ground while shouting “Cease now from my virginity, evil one!” (“*Cessa iam, maligne, de mea uirginitate*” Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 206) or “Leave my virginity alone!” (“*Gewit fram minum magþade!*” Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 124).

60 Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole* 61, 379.

61 Richard Kieckhefer, “Erotic Magic in Medieval Europe,” in *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury, Garland Medieval Casebooks: Vol. 3 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 40. It seems possible that Olibrius’ may have acquired the magical prowess that the Stanzaic Life normally attributes to Margaret’s father. In the Stanzaic Life, one reads:

Her fader was a patryarke, as I telle you may. In Antioche a wyfe he
chees in that false laye. Febylle was his herte and false was his
faye; The fendys oute of helle, thei servyd hym both nyghte and
day. Theodosy it was his name. One God loved he noghte; He beleved
in false goddys that were with hondys wroghte. They had a chylde
schulde crystened be, it ranne hym welle in thoughte. He comaunded
whann hit was borne it schulde be broghte to noughte.

(Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 115)

Thus, Margaret's father in the Stanzaic Life is the one who is served by the devils of hell and works magic, while the Ashmole version attributes this practice to Olibrius.

- 62 Kieckhefer, "Erotic Magic," 40–41.
- 63 As Shuffelton points out in his annotations on the side of the page (Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole* 61, 379).
- 64 Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole* 61, 377.
- 65 Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, 164.
- 66 Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 3.
- 67 Cooper, "Why Is Margaret's the Only Life," 70–71.
- 68 Respectively, "*qui erat gentiliū patriarcha et idola adorabat*" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 195); "*hæþenre hehfæder*" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 112); and "*hæþen cynyng*" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 152).
- 69 Evans, "The Jew, the Host and the Virgin Martyr," 172.
- 70 Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, 141–143.
- 71 This generalized concept of "the enemy" of Christianity is explored more fully in Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). While I will be drawing on specific elements of his research and conclusions in this section, Anidjar broadly argues that potential differences between Jews and Arabs were frequently collapsed such that anything that pertained to either the Arab or the Jew could in fact pertain to both. Jeremy Cohen offers a similar perspective on the relationship between Jews, Muslims and heretics: "Yet a further result of the classification of Jews within the same genus as other nonconformists was the attribution of one's group's qualities, whether real or imagined, to members of the others. Even as the Jews continued to personify that which Christian society deemed imperfect in itself, it could now be assumed that what they shared with Muslims and heretics was not limited to the fact of their opposition to Catholic Christianity. Inasmuch as Muslims and Jews shared ethnic, linguistic, and presumably religious characteristics, one could logically conclude that they harbored similar hostility towards Christendom, the former from without, the latter from within" (Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999], 158).
- 72 The two sources are similar enough that comparisons of minute details would be excessive and yield little in the way of results. Thus, the quotations will be from the Paris version unless a notable difference appears in the Nero.
- 73 "*Domine, potestas tua non potest ei esse communis, quia non est serviens diis nostris sed Deum inuocabat, et Christum quem Iudei crucifixerunt adorabat*" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 196).
- 74 "*“Quem deum colis uel quem adoras?” ... ‘Ego inuoco Deum omnipotentem et Filium eius Dominum Iesum Christum, qui meam uirginitatem usque in presentem diem inlesam atque inuiolatam custodiuit. Ego inuoco nomen Christ, quem patres tui crucifixerunt et propter hoc perierunt’*" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 198; italics mine).
- 75 "*“Clypest þu on þone Crist þe mine fæderas ahengon’ ... ‘Þine fæderas Crist ahengon and þy hi ealle forwurdon’*" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 116).
- 76 This is likely one of the many corrections that the latter two of the three scribes made to harmonize the text with West Saxon conventions, since the likelihood is that the text had a Mercian and Northumbrian stage in its transmission (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 97–98).

- 77 "Ic lufige God Ælmihtigne ... þæt is se þe þine yldran ahengan and þurh þære dæde hi losian sculon" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 156).
- 78 The verb *sculon* can also carry the valence of "must, ought, or be fitting and proper." In something of an eerie synchrony, Bosworth-Toller notes in their examples of *sculon* being used to mean "shall, must, as being decreed by fate:" "Hié (the Jews) God sylfne áhéngon; ðæs hié sculon werɡðu dreógan." (The Jews hung God himself, thus they must suffer a curse).
- 79 "gemiltse þinum fæggran lichaman and gebide þe to minum gode" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 156).
- 80 "Gif þu nylt to minum gode þe gebiddan, min swyrd sceal þinne þone fæggran lichaman eall ... And gif þu woldest me lufian and to minum godum þe gebiddan, þe sceolde beon eall swa wel eall swa me selfan" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 158).
- 81 "Ðu wyrcest þines fæðeres weorc, þæt is se deofol self" Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 160). As previously noted, it is actually Olibrius who speaks the line in the manuscript, but Clayton and Magennis argue that this is likely a translation error on the part of the scribe who first rendered the Latin into Old English (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 62–63).
- 82 "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (KJV).
- 83 In addition to this reference, Olibrius is further identified with the same religious group when the author declares toward the end of the *Life* "Ful welle sawe that Sarysyne that he myghte not her stere" (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 125).
- 84 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 116.
- 85 Examples include "The Saryssones dydde as he hem badde to mayden Margarete" (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 116); "The Saryssones to hym wenten and seyden alle her sawe" (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 117); "Tho Saryssonnes agayne wentyn to that mayde Margarete" (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 118); "The Saryssones dydde as he hem badde and to her gunne dryve" (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 119); and "The Saressones dyde as he hem baade, lampys for to wellyn" (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 124).
- 86 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 125. Reames points out in a later note that while it is possible that Margaret is cursing the Saracens, it seems more likely that the narrator is the speaker (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 133).
- 87 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 116.
- 88 Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, 153.
- 89 "Like many of his contemporary Eastern [Saxon] brethren, Bede saw this as a clear reference to the Saracen conquests: 'Now how great is his hand against all and all hands against him; as they impose his authority upon the whole length of Africa and hold both the greater part of Asia and some of Europe, hating and opposing all'" (John Victor Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2002], 75).
- 90 "In the long prologue to the *Contra sectam* ... the need to refute Muhammad's sect is particularly urgent; its acolytes are the 'worst adversaries' of the church, for they dominate Asia and Africa and are present even in Europe (in Spain)" (Tolan, *Saracens*, 159).
- 91 For example, "*bene tibi erit sicut et mihi*" (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives*, 198) suggests that things will be as well for Margaret as they will be for Olibrius, likely in an economic context.
- 92 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 116.
- 93 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 119.

- 94 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 124.
- 95 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 208.
- 96 Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*, 374.
- 97 Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*, 375–376.
- 98 “Beleve on my goddys and turne nowe thi mode” (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 119); “Beleve on my goddys, yit I rede thee” (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 120); and “Myne goddys be verry good, and thyn is untrewre” (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 124).
- 99 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 120. The perception that Saracens were involved in idol worship was relatively common (See Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art*, Cambridge New Art History and Criticism [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989], chp. 3), a concept that the author may be using without being explicit in the text.
- 100 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 115.
- 101 Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*, 374.
- 102 Other examples include “Also he servyd dey and nyght/Hys fals godys” (Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*, 373); “For all the peynes we to hyr gyve/Sche wyll not on oure godys beleve” (Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*, 376); and “My godys are trew and thyn are lesse” (Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*, 381).
- 103 Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*, 375.
- 104 Anidjar, *The Jew, The Arab*, 34.
- 105 Camille, *The Gothic Idol*, 138.
- 106 See John Victor Tolan, “Muslims as Pagan Idolators in Chronicles of the First Crusade,” in *Western View of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 97–117 in addition to Tolan, *Saracens*.
- 107 Clayton and Magennis note that the Tiberius version follows a “no-longer extant Latin variant of the Mombritius and pre-Mombritius tradition” that was likely “a form of the common original from which both the Mombritius and Casinensis versions derive” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 42). As previously noted, the CCC version, though closer to the “standard” BHL 5303 Mombritius text, has several significant differences which could either be the addition of the Old English scribe or the result of copying an unknown Mombritius variant.
- 108 One possible explanation for this shift that has occurred to me is the actual presence of Jews in England after the Norman Conquest. The Cotton Tiberius manuscript (produced in the mid-11th century) and the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College (first half of the 12th century) may have been copied at a time when scribes (and in the case of CCC version Margaret, the laity that I argued in [Chapter 3](#) that they wrote to) were struggling with an actual Jewish presence in England. This more proximal “other” may account for the “more” Jewish Olibrius present in both texts. However, this should be treated as merely a hypothesis given the difficulties in isolating the influences on both versions.
- 109 Certainly, the two poems display this influence in other, more banal ways such as the recasting of Olibrius’ servants into “knyghts” and Margaret being referred to as a “damysel.” Even Margaret being spirited away by her mother in both versions “recalls the romance *topos* of the banished child in medieval romance” (Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*, 573).
- 110 As previously noted, the fact that Margaret’s tale occurs in Antioch makes it easy for the narrative to be moved into a crusading context.
- 111 Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale

University Press, 1977), 161.

112 Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby*, 188.

113 Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby*, 189.

114 Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby*, 190.

115 Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby*, 190–91.

116 Nigel Bryant, *The High Book of the Grail: A Translation of the 13th Century Romance of Perlesvaus* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1978), 73.

117 Bryant, *The High Book of the Grail*, 73.

118 Bryant, *The High Book of the Grail*, 73.

119 See the conversion of the “Turning Castle” composed entirely of those worshipping the “Old Law” until such time as a good knight comes to save their souls (Bryant, *The High Book of the Grail*, 161) or the deaths of the three knights of the “Mad Castle” who become so insane upon seeing a knight of the “New Law” that they cannot be reasoned with, descend to the level of wild beasts, and attack.

120 Robert Rouse, “Expectation vs. Experience: Encountering the Saracen Other in Middle English Romance,” *The Journal of the Spanish Society for Medieval English Language and Literature* 10 (2002): 134.

121 Richard W. Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors: The Religious Ideology of Chivalry*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 112.

122 The Latin of the Paris and Nero versions would likely have to have been “filtered” through a professional religious intermediary before reaching the laity. Similarly, both the Tiberius and CCC versions contain suggestions that they were used for pastoral purposes by professional religious (see Cooper “Why is Margaret’s the Only Life” for the Tiberius; Elaine Treharne, “A Note on the Sensational Old English Life of St Margaret”).

123 Reames notes that the rhyming scheme of the Stanzaic Life would have made the poem entertaining for those reading or listening to it recited (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 112).

124 To a norys that wonyd ther/For to putte hyre to lere./He toke with hym grete spendyng/For to kepe that meyden yenge,/And sche hyr kepte ther in dede,/And noryschyd her in that nede (Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole* 61, 372).

125 Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole* 61, 571.

126 Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole* 61, 15.

127 Regarding Jews, F. E. Peters, *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition*, vol. 1: The Peoples of God (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009) notes that the Synod of Elvira (c.300), one of the earliest councils of bishops, passed a ban on Jews and Christians marrying. A similar ban was later put in place by Constantine and clarified in the Theodosian Code. From there, the ban was reiterated in future legal codes and trickled into many European civil statutes as a result (180–181). This sexual segregation becomes even more apparent in England with the 13th-century law code, *Fleta*, which declared: “Those cohabiting with Jews or Jewesses, those engaged in bestiality and sodomy are to be burned alive” (Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* [Routledge: New York, 1990], 106). Regarding Saracens, Cohen states “because they supposedly originated in the distant south, where the planet Venus was thought to be ascendant, Saracens were said to be bodily predisposed towards licentiousness. Jacque de Vitry, who had been both a crusader and a bishop of Acre, asserted that those considered most religious among the Saracens were those who had impregnated the most women. Anti-Islamic polemic and literary texts alike agreed that the Saracens permitted polygamy, adultery,

concubinage, and sodomy. Hutcheson and Blackmore aptly label erotic excess the ‘unique mode’ for the conveyance of Muslim cultural and racial alterity” (Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 208).

- 128 See Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), esp. [chapters 3 and 4](#).
- 129 I use scare quotes here to indicate that very few English Christians were ever physically close to Muslims, rather I use close to indicate that English Christians identified themselves – at least in part – in terms of their opposition to Saracens, thereby constructing a portion of their identity around the idea of Saracenhooood as a negative identity.
- 130 One could argue that all of the monsters surveyed so far contribute to this blessing. For example, Olibrius’ torture and subsequent execution of Margaret make a martyr of her, thus enabling her to pray for the blessings she receives at the end of her life. On the other hand, the black demon provides the clearest sign of Margaret’s mastery over demons (especially in some versions when she places her foot upon his head in a clear act of dominance), and in some versions the creature claims to be responsible for attacking pregnant women and babies *in utero* (see [Chapter 5](#)). Nevertheless, the most recognizable analogue to labor is Margaret emerging from the dragon.

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5 Paging Dr. Margaret

Prayers and pregnancy in the *Life of St. Margaret*

Of all the roles credited to her, the one which Margaret is best known for is the patron saint of pregnant women. Whether it is references to medieval medical practices,¹ the dangers for women in childbirth,² or simply her popularity among women,³ a reference to Margaret almost always includes a mention of her aid for parturient women.

Just as frequently, this efficacy is linked to her battle with the dragon in her prison cell, specifically her being swallowed and emerging safe and unharmed. Jane Schulenburg writes in *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, Ca. 500–1100* that “shortly before her death, Margaret prayed to God that the memory of her escape from the belly of the dragon might provide help to those suffering from the pains of childbirth.”⁴ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne has twice noted the “mimetic principle whereby Margaret’s emergence from the dragon’s body prefigures and eases that of the child from the woman in labour.”⁵ The commentary on works of art connected to childbirth that depict associations between Margaret and her dragon has also proved to be a particularly fruitful area of analysis.⁶

However, these studies tend to treat only the later middle ages, the period when this theme was well-established, or sometimes even address the dragon’s association with childbirth as a historical given. In fact, the association of the dragon with childbirth develops slowly. In “Who is the Master of This Narrative? Maternal Patronage of the Cult of St. Margaret,” Larson suggests that there was significant doubt on the part of some clerics as to the veracity of Margaret being swallowed by her dragon.⁷ Despite this doubt, the scene was retained due to an informal power exerted upon the narratives by Margaret’s female adherents. Larson then roughly sketches the impact of this informal power, noting an increasing concern for maternal interests in a diachronic progression of Lives.

In this analysis, Larson only briefly comments upon the prayers that Margaret makes at the end of her various Lives. In the context of the narrative, Margaret’s prayers occur just prior to her martyrdom, and typically take the form of “if someone does X, give them Y,” a clear “anticipation” of cultic veneration and the benefits that Margaret will offer to her adherents. Of course, these prayers are not an

“anticipation” on the part of Margaret, but the creations of later redactors of the *Life*. For these prayers to speak meaningfully to her adherents, such prayers would have had to reflect blessings and requirements that Margaret’s adherents expected to receive and offer. Thus, these prayers offer a telling view of the interests of Margaret’s cult and the make-up of her adherents.

In this chapter, I focus my analytical attention upon these prayers. It is my hope that such attention will yield results that will further nuance the picture of the wake left behind by the informal power that women exercised upon Margaret’s *Lives* and cult, and a greater understanding of the development of Margaret’s role as an intercessor during childbirth in England. In particular, my analysis will focus upon the development of Margaret’s prayers within the Mombritius tradition, the most popular Latin tradition in England (as well as Europe in general) and the version of the *Life* that contributed to the greatest number of vernacular versions.

This analysis will show that Margaret begins her cultic veneration in England primarily as a champion over the demonic. Through this role as a castigator of demons, Margaret is associated with a variety of ills in children that are biblically associated with demonic possession. However, after the 13th century, a marked change occurs in the *Lives*: Margaret becomes more closely linked with childbirth, not through demons, but through a sympathetic connection with her adherents. I will argue that this shift corresponds to an increase in the level of informal power that women exerted over the *Life*, corresponding with a flourishing of Margaret’s cult in England.

At roughly the same time period, the image of Margaret emerging from the belly of the dragon surges in popularity, an image that Larson (and many others) associates with childbirth. Considering the importance of this image, I will turn to the various reasons scholars have given that medieval women may have associated Margaret and her ordeal with the dragon with pregnancy and parturition. After laying out the prevailing opinions in the field, my own research offers a more detailed reading of each interpretation, after which I present my own associations between this image and parturiency. In particular, I argue that women may have seen a mimetic association between Margaret emerging from the artificial “womb” of the dragon and their own emergence from the artificial “womb” of the lying-in room.

Margaret’s blessings

To begin, I address the written evidence of Margaret’s blessings for parturient mothers in the *Lives*. My analysis will focus on eight

versions of the *Life*: five versions previously analyzed – the Paris, Katherine Group, Stanzaic, Tiberius, and CCC version *Lives* (the latter two of which will receive “honorable mention” only) – and three new versions of the *Life* – the *Life of Margaret* in London, BL Cotton Caligula A.viii (Caligula); an example of the South English Legendary version of Margaret found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 145 (SEL); and John Lydgate’s *The Lyfe of Seynt Margarete* in Durham University Library MS Cosin V.II.14 (*Lyfe*). As I have already noted, I am primarily interested in the Mombritius tradition in this work, but readers may note that the Cotton Caligula text hails from a distinctly different, eponymously-named, textual tradition. However, considering that the main topic of this chapter is pregnancy, I would be remiss if I did not address the Caligula version, which contains the earliest instance in England of Margaret’s blessings for parturient women.⁸

I will begin my analysis with the Paris version.⁹ Margaret’s prayers in the Paris version begin toward the end of her *Life* when her executioner, Malchus, gives her time to pray:

Then the blessed Margaret began to pray and said, “God, you who measured the sky with your palm and set the earth as a fundament, and it did not transgress your command, hear my prayer, Lord, that if anyone reads that book of my deeds or hears my passion read, in that hour let his sins be forgiven; and he who comes with his own light to the church where my relics are, forgive his sins too. Whoever is found mindful of my name at the terrible judgment, free him from torments. Furthermore, I ask, Lord, that he who reads or bears in his hand or who listens to <my *Life*>, from that hour let his sins be forgiven. I pray further Lord that he who erects a basilica in my name or who prepares a book of my passion through his own labor, fill him with your Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth, and in that house let an infant not be born deaf nor blind nor mute.”¹⁰

These prayers offer little in the way of comfort for women and their children. There are no blessings for parturient women, and Margaret only requests that children “not be born” with specific disabilities, rather than asking that children be born safely. The prayers regarding childbirth are rather limited in their scope and word count, and they only stand to benefit one wealthy enough to erect a basilica or have a book copied, no mean feat in either case for those living in the Middle Ages.

Comparatively, Margaret’s prayers for the forgiveness of sins are voluminous. Requiring nothing more than a votive light or her name, Margaret extends her protection against sin to those in both this life and the next. Contrary to the prayers she offers for children, the Margaret of the Paris version offers significant detail for the

forgiveness of sins and her blessings are easy to acquire.

Margaret's prayers are also typically followed by a *responsum* from a dove. While these frequently add little to the content of Margaret's prayers, the dove's response in the Paris version is interesting due to its additions to Margaret's blessings:

Blessed are you, Margaret, who conquered the world and sought the holy oil. Blessed are you among women, because in your prayers you remembered everyone." Then hearing these things, blessed Margaret fell to her face upon the earth and everyone who had come did the same, and the dove touched her and said, "I promise through my own self and through my glory, whatever you asked for in your prayer, your prayers have been heard and what you did not remember, I granted to you. Blessed are you, who in your torments remembered all sinners. But wherever your relics or a book of your passion or a memorial of your name may be, and a sinner comes praying to that location with tears and makes mention of your name, without doubt he will receive the remission of sins...¹¹

While the wording is not exact, it is difficult not to read Elizabeth's cry from Luke 1:42 ("*benedicta tu inter mulieres et benedictus fructus ventris tui*") into the dove's blessing to Margaret ("*Beata es inter mulieres, quia in orationibus tuis omnes memorasti*"). Likely, this could have tied Margaret's role more firmly to childbirth and as an intercessor for the forgiveness of sins. The dove further grants Margaret everything for which she originally asked, and even those things which she forgot to request. While this has little bearing upon what Margaret's prayers specifically say, it does open the possibility that individuals could "discover" efficacious blessings which Margaret "forgot," opening up the possibility of extra-textual practices.¹²

While the dove tells Margaret that she has "remembered everyone in her prayers," Margaret's prayers in the Paris version seem destined for a smaller audience. The text is written in Latin, suggesting that the primary reader/listener of the text would be one of the educated elite, if not specifically an individual given to a religious profession. Moreover, while the remission of sins is offered to everyone, only those of high economic status would be able to garner the benefits for childbirth which Margaret offers: for the text to speak meaningfully to its audience, at least some must be able to build the basilica or furnish the book¹³ which Margaret requests. Finally, the text pays little mind toward the health of the mother or the safety of mother and child during childbirth, instead focusing upon the fact that the child will be born whole and sound. Given this evidence, it seems likely that this version of Margaret was destined for an audience among the wealthy, educated elite or those serving them. It seems equally likely that the piece indicates both male authorship and readership as a result. The

codicology of Paris, BN, lat. 5574 contains nothing to suggest that there are any differences between the primary and secondary audiences in terms of occupation or socioeconomic class.¹⁴

The majority of Margaret's prayers focus upon the forgiveness of sins and not upon blessings for pregnant women. Those portions of the prayers that do focus on such blessings suggest little concern over the welfare of parturient women, are financially quite difficult to acquire, and focus upon the welfare of children *after* birth. This welfare is significantly tied to Margaret's role as a castigator of demons, a role that is further reinforced after Margaret's death when the angels come to bless her body "and demons came and suffered and called out with their voices 'the One God of the blessed Margaret is great and powerful'" and when "demons coming to the relics of the blessed Margaret were tormented."¹⁵ Thus, it is not the health of the child that Margaret ensures, but a lack of intervention by demons in the birth, an intervention clearly tied to disability in the child rather than safety during parturiency.

While the Margaret of the Paris version is a fearsome foe of demons, the Margaret of the Caligula tradition is far more focused on pregnancy. Although there are many similarities between the Caligular and Mombritius *Lives*, E.A. Francis concludes that the two emerge from separate traditions.¹⁶ However, since the Caligula version is both surprisingly well-traveled in England¹⁷ and contains the first instance of concrete blessings for the welfare of Margaret's pregnant adherents, I treat it here:

God, most high redeemer of the world, I give thanks to you with my heart and mouth, you who separated me from the filth of this earth and carried me to this glory with an unstained body. Heed my prayer, most loving Father, and grant that if anyone writes the tortures that I bravely bore because of the confession of your name, or reads them, or makes a memorial to me, let him receive mercy for his crimes and let him receive the unfading crown in the future. Whosoever invokes me in his prayers having been put in a tight spot legally, let your most merciful clemency not be denied to him but pluck him from the hand of the enforcer. I also pray most merciful Jesus, that he who dedicates a basilica to you in honor of my name or who dedicates a votive candle from his own labor in it, let him have whatever he ask for that is useful for his salvation, and perpetually let the consecration of the Holy Spirit descend over that home. Moreover, if in the home there is a pregnant woman in labor invoking me, pull her from her imminent danger, and let her infant likewise having been delivered from the womb take possession of the light of this world without any deformity of his members.¹⁸

Perhaps the most striking difference between the Paris and Caligula

versions is their outlook on pregnancy. In the Caligula, we have the earliest (to-date) reference of Margaret's blessing for parturient women:¹⁹ "if a pregnant woman is in labor in that house and calls to me, pull her from her imminent danger."²⁰ Margaret's blessings also request a safe birth for children ("let her infant likewise having been delivered from the womb take possession of the light of this world") in addition to a lack of deformity, whereas the Paris lists specific deformities that Margaret can prevent.²¹

However, much like the Mombritius, there are still conditions to acquire these blessings. Margaret first prays that he who dedicates a basilica to you in honor of my name or who dedicates a votive candle from his own labor in it, let him have whatever he asks for that is useful for his salvation and perpetually let the consecration of the Holy Spirit descend over that home.

This is then followed by Margaret's "moreover" clause, which makes her blessings for mothers and children appear to be contingent upon a household member either endowing a basilica or at least tending some votive candles. Thus, while the addition of the votive candle "clause" in Margaret's blessing is slightly more accommodating to the economically disadvantaged than the Paris version, it may have necessitated travel on the part of her supplicants (depending on the availability of a basilica dedicated to Margaret) and some degree of pre-planning on the part of her adherents. Moreover, these blessings are hardly the Caligula Margaret's primary concern. Quite to the contrary, Margaret begins her prayers with a blessing for the remission of sin. This is then (quite cleverly) transformed into a blessing for mercy in difficult judicial proceedings. It is between these two blessings that the majority of the word count of Margaret's prayers is distributed.

Shifting to audience, the Caligula version, due to its Latin language, was likely redacted by a member of the male religious elite just like the Paris version. However, the presence of prayers that offer such significant support for pregnant women may suggest a burgeoning recognition of possible lay female audience members.

The contents of the Caligula manuscript itself suggest that the audience of the manuscript was intended for a group of religious professionals. The manuscript is a compilation of Saints' Lives (eleven saints in total; the majority being of English saints save for Margaret, Katherine, Mary Magdalen, and Benedict), the Chronicles of Simon of Durham, and the Vision of the Monk of Eynesham. The manuscript itself likely belonged to the Prior and Convent of Ely.²² This combined with the Latin language of the text suggest that Cotton Caligula was copied by and likely intended for a group of religious professionals, a possibility further supported by the presence of the Chronicles of

Simon of Durham and the Vision of the Monk of Eynesham in the collection – two texts of monastic interest written by monastic chroniclers.

Overall, the character of Margaret in the Caligula version is significantly different from the Paris version. Rather than focusing upon the eradication of sin and demonic influences, the Margaret of the Caligula version is much more closely allied with the concepts of justice and legal proceedings (supernatural or otherwise). While this Margaret is also more focused on her possible pregnant adherents, the Latin language of the text suggests little direct contact with such a group, a conclusion further supported by the potentially difficult conditions required to receive her blessings and the primary interest of Margaret's prayers being judicial proceedings. Nevertheless, religious professionals ministering to women locally must have had a different sense of these women's needs than other Lives show.

Before shifting my attention to the vernacular Lives under consideration, I take a moment to address the Tiberius and CCC versions of the Life. Since the prayers of the two Old English versions are very similar to Margaret's prayers in the Paris version, it should suffice to say where they deviate. In the Tiberius version, Margaret's prayers are focused – as in Paris – on preventing children from being born blind, mute, or deaf, adding only that children should also not be born lame or “troubled by an evil spirit.”²³ The Tiberius version also requires expenses similar to the Paris version to procure Margaret's blessings related to childbirth – adding the possibility of procuring a book of Margaret's Life with one's own money. The prayers of the CCC version also address very similar ailments – “may not an unhealthy child be born, nor cripple, nor dumb, nor deaf, nor blind nor mad”²⁴ – but offer conditions that appear similar to the Caligula version rather than the Paris version.²⁵ Both also suggest a conception of Margaret very similar to the Paris version: a champion over the demonic.²⁶

This image is all the more striking due to the audience of both Old English versions. While the Paris version (and for that matter, Caligula) both seemed destined for consumption by a religious elite given language and manuscript contents, the Tiberius and CCC versions suggest through both their contents²⁷ and the contents of the manuscripts²⁸ that they were used in pastoral care. This suggests that the notion of Margaret as a champion over demons was anticipated by a lay audience. Thus, the image of Margaret in the Paris version is not one reserved for the clerical elite, but rather a “standard” conception of the saint that was readily recognizable to the laity.

While this image of Margaret as a castigator of demons does not change significantly, requirements for travel and expense found in the Paris and Caligula versions (and Tiberius and CCC version) fade away

in the Katherine Group version. As I have argued in [Chapter 2](#), there is evidence of audience partitioning in this redaction when the demon addresses the virgins in the audience and offers guidance as to how to maintain the anchoritic life. In Margaret's prayers, we find evidence of another such partition, this time when Margaret speaks directly to the mothers of the stated audience and offers them her blessings:

God, Lord of Men, excellent are your judgments, although they are secret and mysterious. Now I have been condemned to death and life with you granted; I thank you for this tender mercy ... You, wisest creator of all, marked and measured heaven with your outstretched hand and with your closed hand the earth. You, captain of the sea-stream, you are the guide and guardian of all living, created beings, seen and unseen, bend your ears, Savior God, and grant my prayers. I bid and beseech you that are my joy and pleasure that whoever writes a book of my life or procures it already written or whoever holds it and has it often on hand or whoever reads it out loud or eagerly listens to it being read with good will, Ruler of Heaven, may all their sins be forgiven immediately. Whosoever builds a chapel or a church in my name or provides it with a light or lamp, Lord, give and grant him the light of heaven. In that house where a woman is in labor, as soon as she remembers my name and my suffering, Lord, quickly help her and answer her prayer, and let no deformed child be born in the house nor lame nor hunchbacked, nor dumb nor deaf nor troubled by a devil. And whoever calls out my name, Loving Lord, at the last Judgment save him from death.²⁹

While the wording of Margaret's prayers has not changed substantially from the Mombritius source material from which the author drew, some significant differences being to emerge between the Paris and the Katherine Group text that seem to suggest the influence of the Caligula.³⁰ First, like the Caligula, Margaret's blessings now focus on the welfare of the parturient mother by promising aid during labor. Moreover, these blessings are not economically out of reach for the prospective mother nor do they require any pre-planned effort, rather such women need only remember Margaret's name and her "*pine*" to derive the benefits of her prayers.³¹ This focus on Margaret's pain – that is, on the events of her Life and her suffering – suggests that knowledge of Margaret and her Life was key to acquiring her blessings. Nevertheless, like the Paris version, Margaret prays for proof against specific deformities – once more those associated with demonic intervention – rather than a general lack of difficulty in labor and a successful birth.

At the same time, like both the Paris and Caligula, the majority of the text is not focused on Margaret's blessings for parturient women. Perhaps not surprisingly (given the virginal focus discussed in

Chapters 2 and 3), Margaret spends the majority of her time glorifying God and thanking him for her death, followed by prayers for the forgiveness of sins. Although Margaret's prayers have taken a turn for the better with respect to parturient mothers, it is by no means the central focus of her requests.

Although the Margaret presented in the Katherine Group version is similar to that in the Paris version, a substantial difference has emerged. Margaret remains a champion against the demonic, as suggested by her prayers for the health of children – tied closely to demonic afflictions – and an aftermath to her execution similar to the Paris version.³² However, her prayers for parturient women are also easily accessible and have no expensive or difficult requirements. While it still cannot be said that Margaret is by any means exclusively focused on childbirth, this punisher of the demonic still has a hand outstretched to assist pregnant women – a hand that was not previously extended, save in the *Caligula Life*.

While the Stanzaic *Life* maintains Margaret's character as a champion against demons, it creatively shifts this role for the benefit of parturient women and their children:

“Alle that to my passyon wylle herken or reede,
Or settes chirche or chapel, or geveth ony almysdede,
Jhesu Cryste mye Lorde, with honoure Thou hem feede.
The joye that is in heven graunte hem to her meede.
“Jhesu Cryste, if ony woman that schal delyvered be,
That Thou helpe than, if sche cale to me,
And unbynde her anoone thorough the vertue of that Tree
That thou dyedeste uppon to make us alle free.
“Lord God, I praye thee, for Thi grete myghte,
As Thou madeste sonne and moone here in erthe to geve a lyghte,
So graunte her that her chylde be borne with alle the lymmes aryghte,
And not to be dumme, nor nothyng broken, nor blynde withouten syghte.
“Also tho that have this day of my dethe in memorye,
Or with good devocyon doth me worshipec or praye,
Jhesu Cryste my Lord, the maydens Sonne Marye,
Have mercye on tho soules, where ever the bodye lye.”
Than spake oure Lorde Jhesu Cryste, Saynte Maryes Sone:
“By heven and by erthe, by sonne and by moone,
Mayde Margarete, I graunte thee thi bone –
To cume to that joye that thou haste wonne.”³³

The prayers of the Stanzaic *Life* focus significantly on the safety of women in labor and the health of their children. In fact, out of the twenty lines that comprise Margaret's prayers, a full eight lines deal with her blessings for children and mothers, the same amount that are devoted to the forgiveness of sins or the listener being assured entry into heaven.

Moreover, the text of the Stanzaic *Life* itself betrays interest in its

maternal audience as well. As Larson has noted,³⁴ this version contains an explanation for the suffering of women and their children in the black demon's address:

There I wyste ony wyfe unborn was her barne,
Thedyr wolde I come belyve, in chilyng to do her harme.
If it were unblesed, I brake it foote or arme,
Or the woman herselfe in some wyse I dydde harme.³⁵

Once more, it is Margaret's power over demons that is connected to her blessings at the end of her *Life*, but the inclusion of this explanation – absent from its Mombritius source material – suggests that the redactor was interested in more concretely tying Margaret's blessings for women and children to the other events in her *Life* and her power over the demonic.

The manuscript from which the text of the Stanzaic *Life* was taken – Cambridge University Library MS Addit. 4122 – further separates itself from the other versions analyzed since it was commissioned by a lay buyer who made use of the codex for private devotional purposes.³⁶ Mary Beth Long notes that MS Addit is likely a custom-made legendary that allowed ready access to the purchaser's favorite Lives.³⁷ Given the contents of the manuscript, it seems likely that MS Addit was created for the purpose of consoling the purchaser during childbirth and having ready access to the protection of the enclosed saints. All three Saints' Lives in the manuscript (Margaret, Mary and Dorothy) were associated with childbirth and the aid of women in such travail. Moreover, of the three stories, Margaret must have been especially dear to the buyer, given that it holds pride of place in the book and contains a highly decorated first page which features "a full page painted border and an historiated initial depicting St Margaret emerging from the side of a dragon."³⁸ This illustrated capital of Margaret emerging from the dragon is no doubt a further sign of the book's association with childbirth. The likelihood seems then that the book was either commissioned by a woman or by someone who was clearly concerned for the safety of a woman during childbirth.

Much like the Margaret of the Paris and *Katherine Group* version, the Margaret of the Stanzaic *Life* is prepared to battle demons on behalf of her adherents. However, the Stanzaic *Life* presents a Margaret who fights the demonic specifically for the benefit of her pregnant adherents and their children. In this alteration, a small but important shift has occurred. In the Paris and Katherine Group texts, Margaret is the bane of demons everywhere, demons who come from miles around to suffer in front of her relics. Since it just so happens that some demons may afflict children with certain disabilities, Margaret is proof against such afflictions. In the Stanzaic *Life*, Margaret's demon claims

personal responsibility not only for harming children but also for accosting pregnant women during labor. Furthermore, the Stanzaic *Life* contains no allusions to the suffering of demons after Margaret's death, suggesting that it is not demons as a general group that she is proof against but *her* demon, the demon who claims responsibility for harming women and children during labor.

Given the decidedly demonic focus of the vast majority of the Lives surveyed thus far, the South English Legendary (SEL)³⁹ version represents a substantial shift in the tradition. In the SEL version, Margaret's prayers begin:

Louerd he[o] sede Iesu Crist þat boʒtest me on þe rode
Mid heorte and mouþ ich þonke þe & wel aʒte of all gode
And þi wille is to bringe me out of þis worles wrechede
And wiþoute wem of mi body to þe ioie of heuene lede
Grante me ich bidde þe for þin wonden uiue
þat ʒif enimon haþ gode munde Louerd of mine liue
And of þe pine þat ich habbe ipoled for þine grace
Oþer writ in god entente and ret in eni place
ʒif hi biddeþ in god entente grante hom milce & ore
ʒif hi in eny anuy beoþ bring hom out of sore
ʒif enymon in onur of me eny chapel deþ rere
Oþer eni weued in churche oþer eni liʒt find þere
In onur of me up is coust Louerd bidde ich þe
ʒif hi biddeþ þing þat is to bidde grante hom for þe loue of me
And ʒif eny womman to me clupeþ in trauail of childe
Oþer biuore my life rede Louerd be[o] hure milde
Ne lete hure noʒt þerewiþ spille ac bring þat child to siʒte
And al sauf of is moder wombe wiþ al is li[m]es riʒte
Moder and child saue boþe Louerd for loue of me
Louerd for þi moder loue þat þeos bone igranted be[o].⁴⁰

Although the SEL Margaret prays for the safety of mother and child in a similar fashion to the Margaret of the Caligula and *Katherine Group* versions, the SEL Margaret shows signs of a marked sympathy for her pregnant adherents. Margaret prays that God should deliver both mother and child safely from their labor “for the love of her” and “for your mother’s love.” This seems less of a prayer and more of a plea: in this scenario, Margaret is not a petitioner to a distant, divine being but a *sponsa Christi* pleading for something from her future husband. The request could just as easily be rephrased as “If you love me, then you’ll...” This also changes the orientation of Margaret to the women reading her story, personalizing her plea and making Margaret more of a confidant than a source of *virtus*.

Margaret's blessings to the sinful also continue to dwindle in this version of the *Life*. The author does not specifically address the category of sin, but it seems reasonable to assume that it may be included within the purview of the unspecified “mercy and grace” –

milce & ore – that is offered to those who ask for it. Nevertheless, this is confined to four lines of Margaret’s 19 line prayer, while her entreaties for pregnant women and their children make up six.

The content of the narrative outside of Margaret’s prayers also suggests that pregnant women were of significant concern to the redactor. In two portions of the narrative, the redactor of the SEL version breaks the “fourth wall” to speak directly to his audience. In the first instance, as Margaret emerges from the dragon, the author comments “Ac þis netelle ich noȝt to soþe for it nis noȝt to soþe iwrite/Ac weþer it is soþ oþer it nis inot noman þat wite/Ac aȝen kunde it were þat þe deuel were to deþe ibroȝt.”⁴¹ However, despite the doubt that the author claims to have over the truth of Margaret’s lethal escape from the dragon’s “sori wombe,” the end of the *Life* features another aside in which the author asserts “Wymmen þat wiþ oþer were wanne hi child bere/Hit were god þat hi radde hure lyf þe sikerore ȝe seoþ it were.”⁴² As Larson has previously suggested, the text claims to be concerned with “truth,” even as it seems to struggle with what the truth is. The technical demonological issue forces a questioning of the tale’s veracity, yet the story must also be true for the women who hear the story as part of the ritual of childbirth.⁴³

Thus, the redactor of the SEL version, despite misgivings about the truth of the dragon scene that were serious enough to be included in the work itself, is willing to dismiss such doubts when the *Life* is used as an aid for parturient women. Since other authors have expressed misgivings about the draconic swallowing,⁴⁴ the redactor of the SEL version had a vested interest in the concerns of pregnant female audience members to allow such a dramatic reversal.

Moreover, there is a larger and more interesting issue at hand in this statement. While the text certainly appears to be struggling with the veracity of Margaret bursting from (and subsequently killing) the dragon, it also points to a practice that we have not yet seen in the texts surveyed: women reading the *Life* together during parturition. More interesting is the fact that Margaret’s prayers in the SEL version *do not even mention this practice as a way to call down her blessings*.⁴⁵ This suggests that the author – no doubt an outsider with minimal contact to women’s birth rituals – is aware of a practice in which women read the *Life* of St. Margaret at the bedside of a laboring woman, a reading which none of the *Lives* I have encountered endorse in Margaret’s prayers. Thus, while Margaret’s prayers offered a means of acquiring her blessings, they must not be seen as the *sole* means that was extent among her female adherents to acquire Margaret’s assistance during labor⁴⁶ – an idea I will develop in greater depth in the next section.

Once more, the character of Margaret has undergone a significant shift. Like the Caligula version, the Margaret of the SEL version has no noticeable connection to demonology in her prayers. Rather, the interest with which she approaches pregnant women in her prayers seems “personal” in nature. This seems to suggest that the redactor (and for that matter, the readers) have made a logical leap of sorts (yet one which, we must assume, was anything but a leap for them). Whereas the Paris, Katherine Group, and Stanzaic Lives all rationalize Margaret’s connection to childbirth through her association with demons, by the time of the SEL version’s composition, Margaret’s connection with childbirth must have been ubiquitous enough to require no rationalization aside from her own interest, an interest that appears to be sympathy with the plight of pregnant women.

Finally, the *Lyfe* of John Lydgate contains a set of prayers that is profoundly focused upon parturient women. This is perhaps not surprising since Lydgate, a prolific author and Benedictine monk at St. Edmund’s monastery located in Bury, was commissioned to redact the Life by Anne Mortimer, the Countess of March, “sometime between 1415 (the year of her marriage to Edmund Mortimer) and 1426 – that is, during the period of her life when she was likeliest to be concerned with childbearing and with Margaret’s special focus as an intercessor.”⁴⁷

Lydgate’s prayers are unique among the versions surveyed, because Lydgate separates Margaret’s prayers into two distinct sections: an indirect dialogue and a direct dialogue. In the indirect dialogue that begins the prayers, Lydgate claims that Margaret prays for her persecutors and for the grace of her adherents.⁴⁸ The direct speech is concerned with her blessings for parturient women:

“And Lorde,” quod she, “to alle be socoure
That for thi sake done to me honoure.
And specyally to thee I beseche
To alle wymmen whiche of childe travayle,
For my sake, oo Lorde, be thou her leche;
Lat my prayere unto hem availe.
Suffre no myschief tho wymmen, Lorde, assaile,
That calle to me for helpe in their grevaunce,
But for my sake save hem fro myschaunce.
“Lat hem, Lorde, not perisshe in their chyllynge;
Be thou her comferte and consolacyoun,
To be delivered thurgh grace of thyn helpynge;
Socoure hem, Lorde, in their tribulacyoun.
This is my praier, this is myn orisoun,
And specially do alle folkes grace
That calle to me for helpe in any place!”
And fro that highe heavenly mansyoun
Was herde a voys in open audience
That God had herde hir peticioun,

Lydgate's version of the *Life* is markedly different from the other lives. First, the division of Margaret's prayers into indirect and direct speech suggests that her prayers for childbirth – the direct speech – were considered more important than her other prayers. In effect, Lydgate is saying to his readers "Margaret prayed many things, but let's focus on the things you want to hear."⁵⁰

Interestingly enough, this group of prayers also excludes any reference to Margaret's blessings for newborn children. This seems surprisingly uncharacteristic for the *Lives* considered thus far, and one must assume that if Lydgate did indeed make a compilation of French and Latin *Lives* that he would have run across such prayers. This indicates that these blessings were likely omitted either intentionally or were deemed unnecessary. It may be reflective of the fact that a woman – concerned with her own safety during childbirth – commissioned the *Life* or a gradual shift in the focus of Margaret's cult from the safety of the child to the exclusive safety of the mother.

The Margaret of Lydgate's *Lyfe* also shares the sympathy with her adherents displayed in the SEL version. Similar to the SEL version, Margaret prays that her pregnant adherents be saved "for my sake." Unlike the SEL version, these "for my sake" pleas are confined to Margaret's blessings for parturient women and appear nowhere else in her prayers. Furthermore, Lydgate's closing further asks "Noble princesses and ladyes of estate/And gentilwomen lower of degré/Lefte up your hertes, calle to your advocate/Seynt Margarete, gemme of chastité/And alle wymmen that have necessité/Praye this mayde ageyn sykenesse and dissesse/In trayvalynge for to do yow ese."⁵¹ By identifying Margaret as "your advocate" to his female readers and encouraging them to "lefte up your hertes" to Margaret when in need of comfort, Lydgate further strengthens this sympathetic connection between Margaret and her adherents.

Finally, to a greater extent than any other *Life* considered, the prayers of Lydgate's *Lyfe* eschew any material associations with Margaret's blessings. There is no mention of books, basilicas, votive candles, or any of the other various accoutrements that previous *Lives* associated with her favor. Rather, the prayers are focused entirely upon having Margaret "in memorie" and calling out to her in prayer.

Of course, the fact that no books are mentioned in Margaret's prayers once more brings up the issue of the SEL version. It seems strange that Lady Marche would commission a work of the *Life* for the purposes of Margaret's aid in childbirth when the very *Life* she commissioned makes no mention of a blessing for those who create such a work! Thus, we are left to assume that the Lady Marche requested that the work be created so that she and the women

attending her labor could read it together.

The character of Margaret in the Lydgate *Lyfe* is not terribly different from that in the SEL version. Both Lives devote significant space to Margaret's blessing for pregnant women, suggest a sympathetic link between Margaret and her adherents, and both redactors show considerable interest in the needs of their pregnant audience members. Rather, the difference is one of degree. Lydgate's *Lyfe* contains the Margaret that is perhaps the closest to what one might expect of a patron saint of childbirth: a "women's advocate" who is concerned only with the safety of parturient mothers.

Gleanings to this point

The texts under consideration suggest a significant shift in several elements of Margaret's prayers over time. First and foremost, Margaret's prayers gradually begin to lose their original focus of absolving petitioners from sin in favor of an increased focus on providing assistance for women in childbirth. The earliest version under consideration (the Paris version) focuses primarily upon the remission of sin to which Margaret's blessings for childbirth appear to be a mere addendum. Beginning with the Stanzaic *Life*, these prayers gradually begin to supplant other concerns in the *Lives* until the Lydgate *Lyfe* completely excises any blessings *other* than those for childbirth from its direct speech.

These blessings for childbirth also change character as well. The Margaret of the Paris version prays for the birth of healthy children rather than the safety of the mother or the baby during the birthing process itself. The Caligula, on the other hand, contains blessings for the safety of both mother and baby during the birthing process. Interestingly, the majority of the vernacular Lives under consideration suggest a hybridization of the blessings of these two Lives, looking after the health of the mother and ensuring children against disability and (occasionally) danger during the birthing process. Eventually, this concern over children is eclipsed in Lydgate's *Lyfe* which only contains blessings for the welfare of the prospective mother.

The means change for the acquisition of these blessings as well. While the blessing provided by Paris and Caligula texts require significant expense and time, the vernacular versions tend to focus on calling out to Margaret and memorializing the events of her Life. This may be as simple as the Katherine Group version's "remember my name and my suffering" to Lydgate's more extensive reminder to women to "lefte up your hertes, call to your advocate, Seynt Margarete."

Several conclusions can be drawn from these shifts. First, the

movement away from the creation of codices, building of basilicas and offering votive candles within them suggests a greater concern over the immediate availability of Margaret's blessings in childbirth. This shift is all the more striking considering that Margaret's other blessings tend to preserve this focus. For instance, the Katherine Group version retains the Mombritius Margaret's blessing for those who build a church in her name, and simply disconnects the blessing for parturient mothers and their children from it. Similarly, the Stanzaic *Life* promises honor to those who "settes churche or chapel, or geveth only almysdede" but only requires mothers to "cale to me." This is likely a result of women exerting the kind of informal power that Larson discusses in her work.

Accompanying this shift is a change in the very character of Margaret's prayers themselves. While the Margaret of the Paris, Caligula, Katherine Group, and Stanzaic *Life* treat all of their supplications equally, the SEL and Lydgate's *Lyfe* respectively punctuate their prayers for mothers by asking Jesus to aid women "for loue of me ... [and] for þi moder loue" and "for my sake, oo Lorde, be though her leche...for my sake save hem fro myschaunce." This serves to set apart the prayers that Margaret makes for her pregnant adherents from the rest, making it seem as if Margaret is pleading specifically for them, that her prayers for pregnancy are more important than her other prayers. These latter versions depict Margaret in her prayers, not as the champion of "everyman," but, to paraphrase Lydgate, as a "women's advocate." In these latter versions, Margaret becomes another woman who participates in the reading of her *Life* during labor, "one of the girls" as it were.

Finally, it also suggests a more concrete timeline for the exercise of women's informal power in England. As noted, the shift from physical expressions of piety (basilicas, codices, votive lights) toward a more memorializing trend suggests women exerting informal power over the narrative. The two Latin versions surveyed (Paris, c.900; Caligula, 11th century) both contain this focus on physical expressions of piety involving significant expense and time (for the Paris, building a basilica or furnishing a codex; for the Caligula, building a church or providing a votive candle in a church dedicated to Margaret). As I suggested in my "honorable mentions," similar physical expressions of piety are required in the Old English versions as well, with the Tiberius version (c. 1050) requiring that a "book of my martyrdom" be kept to receive her blessings and the CCC version (c. 1150) requesting that a *Life* be written, a church built in her name, or alms and candles dedicated at such a church. Conversely, the Katherine Group version (13th century) abruptly severs ties to books and buildings *only* in Margaret's blessings for parturient women, a trend

that is continued in the remaining vernacular Lives.

Dresvina notes that the 13th century “witnessed a rise and strengthening of the cult”⁵² of St. Margaret. Given the textual evidence considered in this chapter, it seems likely that this rise of Margaret’s cult precipitated greater feminine interest in the saint. This growing feminine component of Margaret’s cult would have placed increasing pressure upon redactors to address their needs (particularly during the dangerous process of childbirth) leading to the diachronic shifts in the Life seen in this chapter.

In particular, this seems to have had a marked effect upon the character of Margaret. In the Paris and *Katherine Group* versions – as well as the two Old English Lives briefly discussed – Margaret is a champion against demons first and an aid for pregnant women and their children a distant second. The Stanzaic *Life* retains this focus on the demonic, but changes its orientation: Margaret is no longer a patron of childbirth because she castigates demons, but specifically castigates a demon that harms women and children, making her the patron saint of childbirth. Finally, this emphasis on demonology fades completely in the SEL and Lydgate versions, leaving Margaret focused on the care and comfort of pregnant women, women that both authors sought to closely ally with Margaret. In short, the image of Margaret presented in her prayers undergoes a dramatic shift from a saint whose benefits could be enjoyed by everyone to a women’s advocate whose prayers narrowly focus on parturition, a shift that must be attributed to increasing pressure upon redactors to address feminine concerns in the *Life*.

At the same time, the effect of increasing literacy among women brought on by the Fourth Lateran Council is evident in the *Lives* through a growing interest in reading the *Life* at bedside. As previously pointed out, the SEL version (produced in the 13th–14th centuries) attests to the popularity of reading the *Life* at the bedside in a group of women for an expectant mother. Lady Marche commissioning Lydgate to create a redaction of the *Life* (1415–1426), MS Addit 4122’s likely use as a birth aid (mid-15th), and Anthonius Guainerius’ suggestion (15th century) that the *Life* be read in childbirth all suggest that this trend of reading the Life continued for quite some time.⁵³ While it cannot be said distinctly when the practice developed/was imported to England, it certainly must have been popular enough at the time of the SEL’s composition that it was noticeable to a male observer of a process that was typically reserved only for women. This level of popularity suggests that literacy among women would have had to have been relatively widespread, a phenomenon that would coincide with the increase in literacy (particularly feminine literacy) in the wake of the Fourth Lateran

Council.

The 13th century also seems to have seen an increasing interest in the association between Margaret and her dragon. The SEL version (13th–14th) attests to the importance of the scene when women read the Life together, and MS Addit – copied in the 15th century – contains a decorated rendering of Margaret emerging from the dragon's side. Larson cites other physical evidence that contains Margaret and her dragon as well, including Margaret emerging from the dragon on a 14th-century French parchment amulet with prayers for childbirth, a mid-14th-century Northern European metal amulet holder in which Margaret is emerging from the dragon's back, and Jan van Eyck's "Arnolfini Betrothal" (1434) which features an image of Margaret emerging from the dragon in a bedroom scene.⁵⁴

Margaret at the bedside

Yet, why was the image of Margaret bursting from the dragon so popular when none of the Lives surveyed directly address the episode's association with childbirth?⁵⁵ It is to this question that I now turn. While Margaret and her dragon are frequently identified as important to the labor process for women in the Middle Ages, references to her importance frequently suggest that Margaret's escape from the dragon indicates that women will not die but instead "be delivered" in the same way Margaret herself was from the dragon.⁵⁶ While most scholars seem content to assert that Margaret emerging intact from her experience with the dragon is sufficient reason for the popularity of the iconic image, this strikes me as ultimately unconvincing: In such an arrangement, the prospective mother is not the lucky Margaret but the dragon that is torn apart.

Furthermore, several commentators on the life share my issue with this explanation: Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's "The Apple's Message," Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski's *Not of Woman Born*, and Jean-Pierre Albert's "*La légende de sainte Marguerite: un mythe maïeutique?*" In this section, I will be further exploring the claims and evidence of each of the three arguments for Margaret and her dragon's connection to childbirth. Once these have been evaluated, I will further argue that the dragon represents the lying-in chamber in which medieval women gave birth and suggest that the diachronic approach used so far in this work may suggest likely periods in which certain interpretations may have been more in vogue than others.

In "The Apple's Message," Wogan-Browne argues that there is a direct mimesis between Margaret bursting from the dragon and a child bursting from its mother:

The mimetic principle whereby Margaret's emergence from the

dragon's body prefigures and eases that of the child from the woman in labour may be thought not to indicate much care or concern for women's bodies, except perhaps as the source of reproduction. If not actual hell-mouths, female bodies are consigned by this congruence to the role of expendable dragons. On the other hand, Margaret herself triumphs and redirects the meaning of her pain and suffering in her legend. Within culturally endemic depreciation of the female body, the promise Margaret's Life held for so many audiences must have been of significant comfort. In such need as often has attended European childbirth, prayers for wholeness and survival are not meaningless.⁵⁷

Wogan-Browne articulates the problem I previously noted (namely that such an emergence shows little concern for the bodies of Margaret's pregnant adherents), but notes that Margaret's pain could be viewed as ultimately transformative. Unfortunately, while it is true that the meaning of Margaret's suffering could be redirected in some fashion, Wogan-Browne does not offer much in the way of specifics as to how women might perceive this suffering as transformative.⁵⁸

Though similar in some ways to Wogan-Browne's interpretation, Blumenfeld-Kosinski's is supported with considerably more evidence to digest. In brief, she argues that the dragon has distinct sexual connotations and that there was a medieval belief that the "dragon-viper gives birth by splitting open."⁵⁹ In this way, Margaret's *Life* (and, perhaps more pointedly, Margaret's dragon) "evokes both sexual violence and the pains of childbirth."⁶⁰ For Blumenfeld-Kosinski, this explains why the Virgin Mary and St. Margaret were both popular protectors in labor: "One gave birth without encountering any of the physical suffering related to it; the other ... had to undergo torments not unlike those experienced during childbirth. Through her ability to sympathize with tormented women she became their ideal intercessor."⁶¹

There is much to credit this interpretation. First, Blumenfeld-Kosinski identifies one way in which the meaning of Margaret's suffering could be "redirected": the dragon represents the pains of labor that wrap the mother round, rather than the mother herself. Thus, Margaret retains her identity as the mother rather than becoming the "child" that bursts from the dragon-mother's body. This is overall a much more calming and comforting image – Margaret emerging from the process of labor safe and unharmed – than the mimetic, matricidal expulsion from the dragon presented earlier.

While this may seem a small detail, such comfort and calm would have been enormously helpful to medieval women considering the dangers of labor.⁶² While the author of *Hali Meidhad* can hardly be considered an impartial judge of the childbirth process, his description

highlights many of the physical difficulties, fears, and pains that women would be expected to experience:

Let's consider further and see what joy arises thereafter, when the child within you awakens and grows, and how many miseries awaken with it that cause you such woe, attacks your flesh and wages war against your own nature with many woes: your rosy face will become lean and as green as grass; your eyes will become dim and hollow; and because of dizziness your head will sorely ache. Within your womb, a swelling in your uterus that bulges forth like a waterskin, pain in your bowels and stitches in your side ... Cares over your labor pains deprives you of the night's sleep. Then it happens: that very sorrowful anguish, that strong and stabbing pain, that ceaseless suffering, that pain upon pain, that wandering wailing; while suffer from that and the doubt of death, besides pain you are also shamed by that contemptible practice of the midwives who know of that painful travail.⁶³

While it is unlikely that parturient mothers looked on the craft of the midwife as shameful, the author does correctly highlight the various aches and pains of pregnancy and childbirth and the fear of death incumbent in the process, a fear that has not departed even into modernity. In the Middle Ages, death was not only a possible outcome, but a likely outcome: with conditions such as breach birth, hemorrhaging, vaginal tearing, and puerperal fever, childbirth was a minefield of potentially lethal possibilities for mother and child alike. That midwives were expected to be able to baptize a baby in the event that it might die is a clear indication of a high infant mortality rate,⁶⁴ and the macabre image in MS Bodley 270b, fol. 215v of "a woman contemplating her own shrouded body after the birth of a child"⁶⁵ is a dark reminder of the likelihood of maternal mortality – which some scholars estimated to be as high as 15–20%.⁶⁶

Second, this interpretation may inform certain depictions of Margaret and her dragon. In particular, it may serve to explain the presence of "dog-like" dragons⁶⁷ in Margaret's imagery: rather than depict the dragon (the perils of labor) as threatening and demonic, artists instead use a familiar image of a beloved and common household pet. Similarly, the sexual nature of the dragon – an interpretation of the dragon that I have pointed out myself in this book – would also explain the frequent appearance of dragons with unicorn horns,⁶⁸ an animal traditionally associated with sexual lust.⁶⁹

Another perspective comes from Jean-Pierre Albert's article "*La légende de sainte Marguerite: un mythe maïeutique?*" Albert argues that it is neither mother nor labor pains that the dragon represents but the womb, and he seeks to connect the image of the dragon with ex-voto offerings that take the form of reptiles and amphibians.⁷⁰ In this

allegory, Margaret's defeat of the dragon is nothing less than the Virgin's conquest of the curse of Eve writ once more.⁷¹

This seems plausible to me as well. In particular, this interpretation could serve to explain why the redactors of St. Margaret tend to use "womb" related words to describe the area from which Margaret bursts.⁷² Moreover, if the dragon is the womb then it is – in essence – doing what it is "supposed to do" when it splits open to expel Margaret. Finally, this interpretation may suggest that images of Margaret astride her dragon are essentially images of the Virgin stamping out the snake, the curse of Eve. It may also suggest a reason for possible blendings between images of the Virgin and Margaret.⁷³

At this point, I would like to branch out and offer my own possible interpretation for the importance of this scene. To begin, I would like to briefly return to Blumenfeld-Kosinski's assertion that Margaret "had to undergo torments not unlike those experienced during childbirth. Through her ability to sympathize with tormented women she became their ideal intercessor."⁷⁴ I would further attempt to finesse this suggestion by pointing out that Margaret not only underwent torments not unlike childbirth but in an environment that was not unlike that in which women gave birth.

In order to further articulate this point, I return to the description of the dragon in the Paris version and my analysis in the first chapter. As I previously wrote, Margaret's experience with the dragon was a location of *imitatio* for pregnant women. Although the dragon appears at first to be the maternal figure in the equation, I argued that it was in fact Margaret that such women were imitating. Mothers were invited to look on St. Margaret not as a figure with whom to directly identify and imitate, but rather as an exemplar for their current "predicament." Inasmuch as Margaret's narrative uses tropes of swallowing as succumbing, Margaret is depicted as someone who experienced sexual temptation. As a result, she is frightened and fears for her life, not unlike women facing the always dangerous and frequently lethal process of childbirth in the Middle Ages. Yet, miraculously Margaret does not die, rather she emerges from the results of succumbing to her sexual temptation "without any injury." In this way, Margaret served as an exemplar of a painless and productive birth process, experiencing metaphorically what the author imagined his feminine audience would hope to experience literally.

As previously noted, Margaret is locked away inside of a cell after Olibrius fails to torture her into acceptance. The presence of Theotimus at the cell window (a character who previously claimed in the introduction that he came to Margaret's narrative only after her death), invites the reader to immerse themselves in what is arguably the most important part of Margaret's narrative. Then:

Behold: suddenly from the corner of the prison came a horrible dragon completely gilded with various colors of hair and with a golden beard. Its teeth were like the sharpest iron. Its eyes shone like a flame of fire, and it blew flame and smoke from its nostrils, and its tongue was panting over its neck, and it seemed as if a two-edged sword was in its hands. For it was terrible and made a stench in the prison from the same fire which issued from its mouth. And St Margaret became as pale as grass and the fear of death came upon her and all her bones were shattered... The dragon opened its mouth and placed it over the head of the blessed Margaret and extended its tongue over her heel and swallowed her into its stomach. But Christ's Cross, which the blessed Margaret had made over herself, expanded in the mouth of the dragon and split it in two parts. Then, blessed Margaret came out of the dragon's belly without any injury to her.⁷⁵

Margaret and her dragon come alive in a perpetual present, an eternal present in which the reader is invited to revel in the colors of the dragon's hair, feel the heat of the flame, and smell the stench of its breath. As the audience watches, Margaret briefly succumbs to carnality and is ingested, resting soundly within the dragon's *uterus*, but then emerges without injury by the virtue of the cross.

With these details fresh in mind, I will now turn to a discussion of the birthing process in the medieval period. In particular, Hellwarth's *The Reproductive Unconscious in Medieval and Early Modern England* has a very interesting reading of medieval birth as ritual, which I will here pull into juxtaposition with some thoughts about Margaret and the dragon. Before I begin, it bears mention that the medieval lying-in chamber is notoriously mysterious for several reasons. First, the birth process was largely a time of sexual segregation: women (the mother-to-be, her attendants, or the midwife) were the primary occupants of the lying-in room in the medieval period.⁷⁶ While the relative absence of men in the lying-in room does not eliminate the possibility of a written account of birth, since women were less frequently taught to write it significantly diminishes the amount of information available upon which to draw prior to the 17th century.⁷⁷ Moreover, based upon later accounts, the childbirth ritual that Hellwarth identifies was something that was intentionally kept secret from men.⁷⁸ Given these difficulties, sources penned by male religious such as *Books of Hours* and accounts of the *Life of St. Margaret* such as the SEL version, provide a glimpse of childbirth rituals as seen from the "outside."⁷⁹

Hellwarth separates the birthing process into three phases: separation, transition, and reincorporation. I will be following the same pattern as I describe the associations that medieval women might have seen between Margaret's *Life* and their own travail. When the time for separation/parturition came, the pregnant woman's

gossips (women who were selected by the future mother to participate in her birth process) would assist in creating a physical space – and a social one – called the “lying-in chamber.” Hellwarth describes the lying-in chamber as:

a kind of womb itself, fully enclosed, and, to some extent, even more impenetrable than the womb it resembled – literally and symbolically. All openings were sealed; windows were closed and covered in order to keep out as much light as possible, and keyholes were also blocked to keep out light. The only source of illumination came from candles. This physical enclosure closely mimicked the enclosed space of anchoresses and anchorites (or vice versa), who lived in a rather small, presumably darkened, room in which their only access to the world was through a small window where they received guests. The special lighting of the candles, and the use of specially made wine (caudle), is also reminiscent of images of church ceremonies.⁸⁰

Immediately, associations between the lying-in chamber and the *Life of St. Margaret* become apparent. First, the lying-in chamber was a kind of cell, not unlike that which anchoresses occupied. As I noted in [Chapter 3](#), Kinane has suggested that the state of enclosure that Margaret finds herself in is not unlike that of the anchoress, an association that would have made it easier to assimilate portions of her *Life* into their religious practice. Thus, the future mother, aching from the pains of extended pregnancy, enters into a cell to start the birthing process, one like the cell that Margaret, aching from the pains of extended torture, was locked away in.

At the same time, the chamber is “a kind of womb itself.” This womb encloses the future mother entirely, reminding the parturient woman of Margaret being swallowed up into the “womb”⁸¹ of the dragon. The impending threat of this swallowing is clearly fearful to both the woman undergoing labor (as suggested by the author of *Hali Meidhad*)⁸² and Margaret herself.⁸³

As Margaret and the parturient mother rest inside the womb, they undergo a period of symbolic gestation. For Margaret, this gestation is immediate as she bursts from the dragon unharmed. For the parturient woman, this gestation took longer and was represented by the stage of transition.

Transition occurred after the mother had given birth to her child. This period of time was divided into three stages, the first of which was confinement in bed (from three days to two weeks in the darkened, womb-like room)... After this confinement, there was the ‘upsitting’ when linens were changed, and the woman could move around the house, but did not go outside for another week or so.⁸⁴

The stages of transition are similar to pregnancy, with the mother

gestating until she has regained enough strength in the womb-like lying-in chamber to “burst forth” into the world once more. To begin with, the new mother is confined to the bed, her movement restricted. After a period of three days to two weeks, the new mother would then enjoy a period of limited mobility in which she was allowed to move about the “womb” of her environment, like the “quickening” of the child during (most typically) the second trimester. Finally, the third stage marks a period of significant movement (much like the increased fetal movement during the third trimester), after which the mother is ready to emerge from her “womb” into the world once more, just as Margaret burst forth from the womb of the dragon.⁸⁵

After emerging from the “womb,” both mother and child would re/join the Christian community. For the child, this was baptism. For the mother, a process called churching, meant to purify her after her carnal experience.⁸⁶ Once more, there is a parallel to Margaret’s experience: Whereas prior to her carnal experience Margaret is frequently depicted as suffering and terrified,⁸⁷ when she emerges from the dragon, Margaret often encounters a dove, her first contact with God. After this contact with the Almighty, Margaret is able to wrestle a demon to the ground and banish him into the earth, cause earthquakes, and survive boiling hot water. Thus, it is her escape from the dragon that galvanizes her saintly *virtus*.

Although women were guaranteed no such miraculous powers, the salvific implications of childbearing were long established by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:13–15:

For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

NIV (New International Version)

No doubt it is a later medieval reflection of this same concept of grace through childbearing that is reflected in the East Anglian N-Town play when one of two midwives at Mary’s birth declares “Whan women travayl grace doth growe.”⁸⁸

This mimesis may also explain the frequent call for memorialization found in many of the vernacular Lives. In the Katherine Group version, Margaret prays that

In that house where a woman is in labor, as soon as she remembers my name and my suffering, Lord, quickly help her and answer her prayer, and let no deformed child be born in the house nor lame nor hunchbacked, nor dumb nor deaf troubled by a devil.⁸⁹

The stress of Margaret’s prayer is on remembering the events of her passion and recalling them during the process of birth, an activity that

would have been made immeasurably easier – given the pain and exhaustion of childbirth – had another individual been present to read the *Life* for the laboring woman during her birthing process (as the later SEL version suggests).⁹⁰

Similarly, Lydgate's *Lyfe* exhorts "Noble princesses and ladyes of estate,/And gentilwomen lower of degre,/Lefte up your hertes, calle to your advocate/Seynt Margarete, gemme of chastite./And aile wymmen that have necessite,/Praye this mayde ageyn sykenesse and dissesse,/In trayvalynge for to do yow ese."⁹¹ The audience in this version is encouraged to "lift up their hearts" to Margaret and to call to their advocate." While this language of advocacy seems to evoke Margaret's more judicial function as an intercessor for sin, the fact that the audience of this advocacy is explicitly composed of women – women who were "noble princesses and ladyes of estate,/And gentilwomen lower of degre," that is, women who were like Lady Marche and her associates – suggests that Margaret is functioning as an advocate in a specifically feminine context, that of birth. Thus, the text exhorts its readers to place their thoughts with Saint Margaret and to think upon her as they undergo the birthing process, again a process that would have been made significantly easier by the presence of someone reading the *Life*.⁹²

In summation, I am proposing that, as labor begins, women would retreat to the "cell" of the lying-in chamber to read the *Life of St. Margaret* to the woman in labor, either specifically focusing on Margaret's encounter with the dragon or more generally reading the entirety of the *Life*. The woman in labor would ruminate upon Margaret's experience with the dragon, but it was not a rumination that made the woman's birthing body a hellish "Hammer horror creature."⁹³ Rather, the woman in travail became Margaret in travail: stuck in the womb from which she hoped to eventually emerge, the woman sought to identify with Saint Margaret and thus to secure her safe return to the world outside of the lying-in chamber, a task that Margaret had done before.

Returning to the larger context of Margaret and her dragon's association with childbirth, it is distinctly possible that all of these associations were present in the birthing room. As I have endeavored to show in this book, Margaret's story is multivalent and complex and lends itself well to shifting categories of interpretation. It may be that women in labor drew comfort from the mimesis of Margaret bursting from the dragon in a variety of different ways, and the associations of the *Life* would have allowed them to do so by viewing the dragon as their own bodies, the onset of labor, the womb, *and* a womb-like lying-in chamber.

The life of the *Life*

From the perspective of the Mombritius tradition, Margaret did not begin her existence in England as a patron saint of childbirth. Rather, Margaret was a warrior who battled demons, not unlike popular images of her Eastern Orthodox “twin” Marina.⁹⁴ It was precisely because she was proof against demons that the earliest *Life* in England attributes her with the powers of an intercessor in childbirth, specifically against maladies thought to befall children as the result of demonic intervention. This perspective on the *Life* would persist over several different versions in the Mombritius tradition – including the Tiberius, CCC version, and *the Katherine Group* version – suggesting that both religious and lay adherents to the *Life* accepted and benefited from this warrior image of Margaret.

However, approximately a century after the advent of the Mombritius version in England, a new version of the *Life* emerged onto the scene: the Caligula version. The prayers of this *Life* depicted Margaret as an intercessor in legal matters, but also contained the seeds for Margaret’s blessings for parturient women.

As the two *Lives* proliferated in England, some degree of cross-pollination would naturally occur: Those familiar with the Mombritius *Life* would have been exposed to the details of the Caligula and vice versa.⁹⁵ This cross-pollination led to the introduction of Margaret’s prayers for parturient women from the Caligula version into the Mombritius tradition, an element of the *Life* that would be relatively static in vernacular versions composed from the 13th century onward. This persistence suggests the profound importance that women in Margaret’s cult placed upon these prayers, as well as a growing influence that women had over the cult beginning in the 13th century.

This influence gradually caused a shift in the character of Margaret in the Mombritius tradition. Gone was the fierce warrior who opposed demonic influences; instead Margaret became a figure concerned with the well-being of her pregnant adherents and (often) their children. As this change occurred, Margaret shifted from a saint for everyman to a women’s advocate in parturientcy.

One notable effect of this shift was the growing importance of the image of Margaret being swallowed and expelled from the dragon. While textual evidence as to the reason for this importance is slim, I have endeavored to lay out the prevailing opinions in the field as to the reason behind this association, those of Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (dragon as mother), Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski (dragon as labor), and Jean-Pierre Albert (dragon as womb). To these interpretations, I also humbly added my own (dragon as lying-in room).

Regardless of which of these associations would have been the most

reassuring to women, such techniques would have provided significant comfort (and thus significant aid) to labor. The presence of books or verbal accounts of the Life in the lying-in room would have offered an eye of calm in the hurricane of trauma that constituted medieval birth, not unlike a medieval “Lamaze” technique. The presence of Margaret would have been tangible to such women, and their informal power clearly did much to solidify an image of St. Margaret with which they could identify and sympathize.

Notes

- 1 See Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca. 500–1100* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 229–230; Geoffrey Chamberlain, *From Witchcraft to Wisdom: A History of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in the British Isles*, III (London: Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 2007), 26
- 2 See Jennifer Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe, 1200–1500* (Harlow, England: Longman, 2004), 55; Jennifer C. Ward, *Women in England in the Middle Ages* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 48.
- 3 See Sherry L. Reames, *Middle English Legends of Women Saints* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), 111.
- 4 Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*, 230.
- 5 Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, “The Apple’s Message: Some Post-Conquest Hagiographic Accounts of Textual Transmission,” in *Late-Medieval Religious Texts and Their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A.I. Doyle*, ed. Anthony Ian Doyle and Alastair J. Minnis (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 1994), 53. A similar assertion is made in Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture c. 1150–1300: Virginity and Its Authorizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 126.
- 6 See Erwin Panofsky, “Jan van Eyck’s Arnolfini Portrait,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 64, no. 372 (March 1, 1934): 117–27; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Not of Woman Born: Representations of Caesarean Birth in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Wogan-Browne, “The Apple’s Message,” and Wendy R. Larson, “Who Is the Master of This Narrative? Maternal Patronage of the Cult of St. Margaret,” in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Lois Drewer, “Margaret of Antioch the Demon-Slayer, East and West: The Iconography of the Predella of the Boston Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine,” *Gesta* 32, no. 1 (January 1, 1993): 11–20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/767014> also contains several references to such artistic depictions, particularly in fn. 1–3.
- 7 Both the Rebendorf tradition (BHL 5308) and the *Golden Legend* contain such rejections.
- 8 Despite this fact, the Caligula version appears to have had little direct impact upon vernacular Lives in England. Rather, as I will argue, this impact is indirect: later Mombritius Lives incorporate the Caligula’s blessings for parturiency.
- 9 My analysis will frequently use contractual language (e.g., clause, conditions, etc.) when describing Margaret’s blessings. While this almost certainly overstates the degree to which the letter of such blessings were followed, there is no hermeneutic device that allows us to appropriately capture how closely

such blessings were adhered to. Thus, it seems best to err on the side of what the text says rather than to make assumptions about practice.

- 10 “*Tunc beata Margareta cepit orare et dicere, ‘Deus, qui celum palme mensurasti et terram fundamentum posuisti et non transiuit preceptum tuum, exaudi, Domine, deprecationem meam, ut, si quis legerit librum istum geste mee uel audierit legere passionem meam, in ipsa hora deleantur peccata illius; et qui cum suo lumine uenerit ad ecclesiam ubi sunt reliquie mee similiter deleantur peccata illius. Quisquis inuentus fuerit in iudicio terribili et memor fuerit nominis mei, libera eum de tormentis. Adhuc peto, Domine, qui legerit aut qui tulerit in manu sua, uel qui audierit eam legendo, ex illa hora deleantur peccata illius. Adhuc peto, Domine, et qui basilicam in nomine meo fecerit, uel qui de suo labore comparauit codicem passionis mee, reple illum Spiritu Sancto tuo, spiritu ueritatis, et in domo illius non nascatur infans claudus aut cecus neque mutus*” (Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 212–214).
- 11 “*“Beata es, Margareta, qui uicisti mundum et quesisti oleum sanctum. Beata es inter mulieres, quia in orationibus tuis omnes memorasti.’ Audiens autem haec, beata Margareta cecidit in faciem suam super terram et omnes qui ibidem aderant, et columba tetigit eam et dixit, ‘Per memetipsum iuro et per gloriam meam, quicquid in oratione tua petisti, exaudite sunt <deprecationes tuae>, et quod non recordasti, tibi datum est. Beata es tu, qui in penis tuis memorasti omnes peccatores. Sed ubi <fuerint> reliquie tue aut codex passionis tue seu memorie nominis tui et ueniens peccator in illum locum orans cum lacrimis et memoriam nominis tui fecerit, sine dubio remissionem peccatorum”*” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 214).

At this point in the Paris version, Clayton and Magennis cite a considerable lacuna which they fill in by using another Latin version, Saint-Omer, Bibl. mun., 202. Given that the dove is almost finished with his speech, I see no reason to add the three or four sentence difference from an alternate manuscript.

- 12 A probable example of such extra-textual blessings exists in the Cotton Nero manuscript considered in [Chapter 4](#). The Life in Cotton Nero is in something of a subsection of the manuscript. The section containing the Life is written in a distinctly different scribal hand than the rest of the work, is noted as a later addition to the manuscript by Clayton and Magennis, and contains (in addition to Margaret) the *Vita Sanctae Fritheswithae Virginis* (retitled by what appears to be the main manuscript scribe as *Vita Sanctae Fritheswithae filiae Didani Regis Oxineforiae*) which starts on 156r and runs until 157v and the *Vita Beati Davidis archieperi et confessoris* (retitled: *Vita Davidis Archiepi Meneuensis per Ricemarchum Monachum*) which starts on f.158r and ends on f.162v. The retitling and scribal differences suggest that the folio pages were a separate document (perhaps an unbound or minimally bound sheaf of pages) which was later “retired” into the larger Cotton Nero E.1 manuscript. Given Margaret’s use during childbirth and the company she keeps (Frithuswith is often credited with the creation of a spring with healing properties and David of Wales with the so-called “corpse candles” that signaled imminent death), it seems likely that the small collection of Lives was created for medicinal use.

Upon opening the manuscript to the Life of Margaret, one is struck by several stains and discolorations on the pages. On f.163v in the middle of the second column there is a reddish-brown stain caused by a liquid that soaked through the folios and ended at 161v. There also appears to be some discoloration and un-uniform lightening of the ink on 163v, 164r and 164v. A large water stain originating in the upper left corner of 164v may account for some of this damage, but the ink discolorations on the lower portion of the manuscript do not appear to have been caused by this stain. The rest of the pages that contain

the version of Margaret appear relatively undamaged (given the date of the manuscript) as do the pages in the rest of the “retired” portion of the manuscript, which leads me to believe that the damage that the version sustained on these pages likely originated from some abnormal use that these pages saw.

Considering that the damaged pages occupy both the portion of the Life that contains the draconic and demonic visitations and the portion that contains Margaret’s prayers, it seems likely that the damage to the pages originated due to some activity involving birth. It may be that the book was opened and placed – text down – upon the laboring woman’s belly, or that it was handled or touched by pregnant women prior to or during the birthing process (see Larson, “Who is the Master of this Narrative?,” 94 and 102–103). In this scenario, the water damage would potentially have been caused by sweat while the reddish brown discoloration may either be blood that found its way onto the manuscript or a peculiarly pronounced ink stain. Despite this evidence of handling to procure blessings in labor, Margaret’s prayers read much like those in the Paris version and offer no such benefits to parturient women or their children by handling the Life.

While the Nero text offers the clearest evidence for such practices, Bodley 285 (Caligula tradition) and Bodleian, Laud. Misc 463 (South English Legendary) have similar signs of wear that may suggest they were also used in the birthing room.

- 13 The fact that the texts specifies that the creation must be a *codex* of Margaret’s passion, serves to reinforce the economic expense. It is possible that Paris BN 5574 is just such a codex.
- 14 “Paris, BN, lat. 5574 is a small collection containing a *uita* of St Christopher, an account of the Invention of the Cross, and the *uitae* of SS Margaret and Juliana” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 95). The Latin language of the text suggests a likely origin among the educated clerical elite. The Paris manuscript’s relationship to London, BL, Royal 5.F.III (which contains Aldhelm’s *De Laude Virginitatis*) seems to support this reading, although it may suggest a potential audience of female religious may have been involved. While it is possible that the lives of SS. Margaret and Juliana could suggest a female religious audience, it is interesting to note that it is not the topic of virginity which binds the contents of the Paris manuscript together but the concept of revelation: St. Christopher bears the Christ child on his back prior to realizing him for what he is, the Invention of the Cross features the discovery of the original Cross hidden beneath buildings constructed by “heathens,” and SS Margaret and Juliana both feature a scene in which their prayers reveal the demons that accost them.
- 15 “*Et ueniebant demones et torquebantur et uocibus clamabant, ‘Vnus Deus fortis magnus beatae Margaritae’*” and “*uenientes daemones ad reliquias beatae Margaritae torquebantur*” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 216).
- 16 Elizabeth A. Francis, “A Hitherto Unprinted Version of the Passio Sanctae Margaritae with Some Observations on Vernacular Derivatives,” *PMLA* 42, no. 1 (March 1, 1927): 87–105, <https://doi.org/10.2307/457577>, 87.
- 17 “The version is extant in a dozen manuscripts, five of which apparently originate in Britain, making the Caligula version nearly as popular as Mombritius in medieval England” (Juliana Dresvina, *A Maid with a Dragon: The Cult of St Margaret of Antioch in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 18).
- 18 “*Altissime seculorum redemptor deus gratias corde et ore tibi ago, qui me de mundi huius colluvione abstraxisti, et ad hanc gloriam inpolluto corpore perduxisti. Respice*

qui piissime pater ad deprecationem meam, et presta ut si quis supplicia que per tuu nominis confessione viriliter pertuli scripserit, aut legerit, vel mei memoriam fecerit, criminum suorum promeretur veniam, et in futuro immarcescibilem percipiat coronam. Quicumque in districto examine positus me invocaverit suis precibus, illi tua misericordissima non denegetur clementia, de manu exactoris eum eripiens. Adhuc clementissime Jesu peto, ut qui basilicam in mei honore nominis tibi dicaverit, vel qui de suo labore in ea luminaria ministraverit adipiscatur quicquid petierit utile sue salutis, et descendat iugiter super illam domum consecratio spiritus sancti. Iterum si in domo me invocans mulier pregnant in partu laboraverit, ab imminente eripe eam periculo, infansque quoque ex utero fusus lumine potiatur seculi huius, absque suorum aliquo detrimento membrorum” (Francis, “A Hitherto Unprinted Version,” 102–103).

19 This is a slight *corrigendum* to Larson’s work which lists Wace’s Anglo-Norman *La Vie de Sainte Marguerite* (1135) as the first mention of Margaret’s protection for mothers (Wendy R. Larson, “The Role of Patronage and Audience in the Cults of Sts Margaret and Marina of Antioch,” in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women, and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Samantha J.E. Riches and Sarah Salih (New York: Routledge, 2002), 26; Larson, “Who is the Master of this Narrative?,” 97). While the Cotton Caligula manuscript itself dates from the 12th century, the earliest version of this *Life* is a Paris BN lat. 5565 which dates from the 11th century (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 18–19), thus making it the earliest known example of such a blessing while the Wace is the earliest vernacular version.

20 One thing which will factor into my later analysis that bears mention at this point is that, despite being the first instance of Margaret’s blessing for parturient women, the dragon of the Caligula text *does not* swallow Margaret:

“Then rising from her prayer, she suddenly saw a dragon – surprisingly large – approaching her from the corner of the prison, and with erect head, a gaping deadly mouth of gullets, a terrible hissing, and a rattling of scales it inflicted the greatest horror on the virgin of Christ. And when she was nearly swallowed by the many open mouths of the beast, but having made the sign of the cross against it, the foul serpent immediately split in two.”

“*Surgens quoque ab oratione, subito draconem mire magnitudinis ab angulo carceris agredientem conspicit, qui erecto capite, rictuque aperto faucium mortifero, terribilibus sibilis ac squamarum stridoribus maximum Christi virgini ingerit horrorem. Cumque iam pene ab ipsis patentibus belue hiatibus absorberetur, vexillo dominice cruces opposito, serpens squalidus continuo crepuit medius*” (Francis, “A Hitherto Unprinted Version,” 99–100).

21 Moreover, this prayer against birth defects cannot be concretely tied to demons due to the lack of specifically named abnormalities.

22 Francis, “A Hitherto Unprinted Version,” 97.

23 “ne fram unclænum gaste geswenct” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 132).

24 “nan unhal cild sy geboren, ne crypol, ne dum, ne deaf, ne blind, ne ungewittes” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 168).

25 “And further I would ask you, dear Lord, that each of the men who erect a church in my name, and of those who wish to come to me with a candle of theirs, and with other alms, and of those who write my passion, or buy it with their money, that in their houses may not an unhealthy child be born...”

“And get ic þe, leofa Drihten, biddan wille, þæt þu ælc þæra manna, þe on minum naman cirice arære, and þan þe me mid heora lihte gesecan willað, and mid oðrum ælmešsan, and þan þe mine þrowunge gewritað, oððe mid heora figa gebicgað, þæt innan heora husum nan unhal cild sy geboren...” (Clayton

and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 168).

- 26 The Tiberius reinforces this image by even including proof against the demonic in her prayers for children, while the CCC version reinforces the demonic ailments by claiming that sufferers of the same received respite through contact with her body (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 170).
- 27 For the Tiberius, see Tracey-Anne Cooper, “Why Is Margaret’s the Only Life in London, BL, Cotton MS Tiberius A.iii?” in *Writing Women Saints in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 55–81; for the CCC version, see [Chapter 2](#).
- 28 For the Tiberius, the contents include directions for confessors, a homily, and pastoral letters, see also Cooper, “Why is Margaret’s the Only Life”; for the CCC version, see Elaine Treharne, “A Note on the Sensational Old English Life of St Margaret,” in *Saints and Scholars: New Perspectives on Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture in Honour of Hugh Magennis* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012).
- 29 “‘Drihtin, leodes Lauerd, duhtie, þah ha dearne beon ant derue, þine domes. Me is nu deað idemet her, and wið þe lif ilenet; þi milde milce Ich þonki hit ... Þu wisest wurhte of alle, merkedest þe heouene ant mete wið þi strahte hone, ant wið þe icluhte þe eorðe; þu steoresmon of sea-stream, þu wissent ant wealdent of alle wiht þe iwrahte beoð, seheliche ant unsehene, buh þine earen, Healent zodd, ant bei to mine benen. Ich bidde ant biseche þe, þet art mi weole ant wunne, þet hwa se eauer boc writ of mi liflade, oðer biȝet hit iwriten, oðer halt hit ant haueð ofttest on honde, oðer hwa se hit eauer redeð oðer þene redere liðeliche lusted, wealdent of heouene, wurde ham alle sone hare sunnen forȝeune. Hwa se on mi nome madeð chapele oðer chirche, oðer findeð in ham liht oðer lampe, þe leome zef him, Lauerd, ant zette him, of heouene. I þet hus þer wummon pineð o childe, sone se ha munneð mi nome ant mi pine, Lauerd, hihendliche help hire ant her hire bene; ne I þe hus ne beo iboren na mislimet bearn, nowðer halt ne houeret, nowðer dumbe ne deaf ne ideruet of deofle. Ant hwa se eauer mi nome munegeð wið muðe, luueliche Lauerd, et te leaste dom ales him from deaðe” (Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1990], 78).
- 30 Alternatively, it may be the influence of the Caligula (or a similar version) through Wace’s Anglo-Norman *La Vie de Sainte Marguerite* (see Dresvina, *A Maid with a Dragon*, 36).
- 31 There also appears to be some degree of synchrony between the prayers in the Caligula and those in the Katherine Group version. Compare for instance:
“Whosoever builds a chapel or a church in my name or provides it with a light or lamp, Lord, give and grant him the light of heaven. In that house where a woman is in labor, as soon as she remembers my name and my suffering, Lord, quickly help her and answer her prayer” (Katherine Group version).
“I also pray most merciful Jesus, that he who dedicates a basilica to you in honor of my name or who dedicates a votive candle from his own labor in it, let him have whatever he requires to be safe and consequently let the consecration of the Holy Spirit descend over that home. Moreover, if a pregnant woman is in labor in that house and calls to me, pull her from her imminent danger” (Caligula version).
- 32 That is, demons verify the Christian God in the wake of her martyrdom (“Þe feondes þe þer weren, deadliche idoruen, fengen to zeien: ‘Margarete, meiden, leoðe nuðe lanhure ant lowse ure bondes. We beoð wel icnawen þet nis na lauerd bute Godd, þe þu on leuest” Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 82) and are tormented (“þa bigunnen þe gastes of helle to þeoten ant to jellen” Millett and Wogan Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 82).

- 33 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 126–127.
- 34 Larson, “Who is the Master of This Narrative?,” 97.
- 35 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 123.
- 36 The Addit manuscript itself is a mid-15th-century manuscript of Middle English verse, but the Stanzaic *Life* of Margaret contained within has its origins in the 13th century. The manuscript contains only three narratives, the first being the Stanzaic *Life* of St. Margaret followed by “a tretys of Oure Lady howe sche was wedded,” and the *Life* of St. Dorothy. Margaret’s *Life* takes up a considerable amount of pages in the manuscript owing to the relatively small size of the book itself (85x123mm) (A. S. G. Edwards, “Fifteenth-Century English Collections of Female Saints’ Lives,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (January 1, 2003): 131–41, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3509021>, 131).
- 37 Mary Beth Long, “Corpora and Manuscripts, Authors and Audiences,” in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. Sarah Salih (Woodbridge; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 53.
- 38 Edwards, “Fifteenth-Century English Collections,” 132. In contrast, the other two items in the manuscript are only offset by large, blue-painted initials with red-pen work.
- 39 The South English Legendary is a collection of Middle English hagiographic literature that is preserved in varying states in over sixty manuscripts and was likely composed somewhere between the 13th and 14th centuries. The most “complete” versions of these manuscripts are Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 145 and British Museum MS Harley 2277 (from which the critical edition of Charlotte D’Evelyn and Anna Jean Mill, *The South English Legendary: Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 145 and British Museum MS Harley 2277, Etc (Volume 1: Text)* [London: Oxford University Press, 1956] was produced).
- 40 D’Evelyn and Mill, *The South English Legendary*, 301.
- 41 D’Evelyn and Mill, *The South English Legendary*, 297. “But I cannot say if this is true for it is not writ as truth, but whether it is true or not no man knows, but it is contrary to nature that the devil be brought to death.”
- 42 D’Evelyn and Mill, *The South English Legendary*, 302. “When women bear children with other women, it is good that they read her *Life* for certainly it is the truth.”
- 43 Larson, “Who is the Master of This Narrative?,” 99.
- 44 Including Margaret’s 10th-century Greek hagiographer, Simeon Metaphrastes, who addresses the scene as a “malicious interpolation” and the author of the *Golden Legend*, Jacobus de Voragine, who claims the scene is “apocryphal” (Larson, 2003, 98).
- 45 Again, extra-textual blessings are not necessarily outside the realm of possibility given those found in the Cotton Nero manuscript detailed previously and the dove’s statement in the Paris version that it will offer both the blessings which Margaret asked for and those she “forgot” to her adherents.
- 46 Larson notes a similar recommendation by the 15th-century physician Anthonius Guianerius of Pavia: “At the time of birth it is good that the legend of blessed Margaret be read, that she have relics of the saints on her, and that you carry out briefly some familiar ceremonies in order to please your patient and the old women” (Larson, “Who is the Master of This Narrative?,” 94).
- 47 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 112–113. The audience of Durham University Library MS Cosin V.II.14 (which contains the copy of Lydgate’s *Lyfe* under consideration) is somewhat less certain, but the other works in the manuscript – Lydgate’s *The Sege of Thebes* (1-68v), the *Parvus* and *Magnus Cato* (69–70; 70–92), the *Life* of St. Alexius (92-97v, preceded by a small couplet), and a *Life* of St. Mary Magdalene translated from Jean de Vignay’s French *Golden Legend*

(Retrieved from "Special Collections: DUL MS Cosin V.II.14 J. Lydgate, *Sege of Thebes*; Etc. s. Xv Med. – Durham University," accessed June 19, 2019, www.dur.ac.uk/library/asc/theme/medmss/apvii14/) – strongly suggest continued use for ease during pregnancy. The *Sege of Thebes* and the *Parvus and Magnus Cato* are didactic in nature. In the first case, the *Sege* is Lydgate's moralizing interpretation of the famed battle, including an illustration of the virtues of a ruler as well as more commonplace pronouncements on behavior and values (Edwards, "15th Century English Collections," 4). Similarly, the *Parvus and Magnus Cato* are collections of maxims that were frequently used as something of an elementary textbook. On the other hand, the *Lives of St. Margaret and Mary Magdalene* are related through childbirth: Margaret through her aid for parturient women and Mary for her aid in conception and birth. Given just these contents, I would assume that the connective tissue that united them would be women's household use: that is, Mary's *Life* would have assisted in conception, Margaret in delivery, and the *Sege* and *Cato* texts would have been used in educational pursuits for the resultant children.

Regarding the *Life of Alexius*, the primary narrative element in Alexius' *Life* is his odd marriage to his wife and his even odder relationship with his family: after completing the ceremony and retiring to the marriage bed, Alexius instructs his wife in his Christian faith, entrusts his marriage ring to her, and flees into the night leaving his wife a virgin. After some time, he returns home but his parents do not recognize him. Taking a place under the stairs, he lives as a beggar in his family's house for years until such time as he dies and the truth is revealed. The last quarter or so of the *Life* is a vivid description of the agony that Alexius' parents and wife go through in realizing that he was under their noses the whole time.

On the surface, regardless of the character that a potential female reader may identify with – mother or wife – the results seem bleak: either a son that abandons her for God or a marriage bereft of a husband. However, St. Alexius' birth was also precipitated by prayers to God, thereby possibly linking it with the Margaret and Mary narratives included in the work. It is also possible that the story may have been a reminder of fidelity in marriage, as Alexius' wife remains faithful to him for the thirty-four years of the story that he is away, living with the mother as her constant companion. In this way, Alexius' *Life* may have been an important – if slightly unorthodox – compliment to both marital fidelity and childbirth in such a book.

- 48 "First she praide of parfite charité/For hir enemys and hir tourmentours,/For hem that caused hir adversité/And had hir prused with mony sharpe shours./Of parfit love she gadrid out the flours,/Praying also for thoo folkes alle/That after helpe unto hir grace calle,/And for all thoo that have hir in memorie,/And swiche as truste in her helpe at nede:/That God hem graunte, sittinge in His glorie,/Of His grace that thei may welle spede,/And ageyn right that no man hem myslede" (Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 160).
- 49 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 160–161.
- 50 The singular exception to this appears to be the general two-line ending to Margaret's prayer: "And specially do all folkes grace/That calle to me for help in any place!" Yet, this seems more of a "wrap-up" to the prayers than something that is individually relevant.
- 51 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 162.
- 52 Dresvina, *A Maid with a Dragon*, 46.
- 53 It may also suggest a *terminus post quem* of the 13th century for such readings. That is, all three examples reading the *Life* for childbirth purposes occur after the 13th century that corresponded with a surge in Margaret's cultic veneration

and the change in Margaret's character mentioned above.

54 Larson, "Who is the Master of This Narrative?," 100–101. Other examples include BL Harley 2974 (f. 165v), manuscript with image of Margaret emerging from dragon, c. 1460–70 north-east France; a statue at the Metropolitan Museum of Art of Margaret emerging from the body of the dragon (Accession Number: 2000.641), c. 1475 Toulouse; BL Burney 345 (f.85v) which contains a decorated capital of Margaret emerging from the dragon, late 13th-century Netherlands; BL Harley 928 (f.30) decorated capital of Margaret emerging from the dragon, late 13th-century England. Further examples of artistic renderings are considered below. Interestingly enough, all of these examples and future ones are dated to or after the 13th century. This is all the more interesting when considered next to Skemer's detailed analysis of birthing amulets of St. Margaret in *Binding Words*: every amulet under consideration in that book was also created in the 13th century or onward (Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages*, Magic in History [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006], 239–247). The correspondence between art, text, and amulets suggests that the dragon image (and therefore, its association with birth) may be a later addition to Margaret's cult than previously suspected. However, significant research would be required to say this conclusively, leaving proof far outside the scope of this book.

55 Even the SEL version's is quite oblique.

56 For example, "Very often she holds the cross in an elegantly restrained manner while she tramples the dragon underfoot. Or, more dramatically, after Margaret has been swallowed by the dragon, the force of the cross causes him to eject her, and Margaret comes bursting out. This miraculous delivery from the belly of the dragon, and her special prayers for women, explain Margaret's role as protector in childbirth, seen, for example, in the statuette of Margaret disgorged from the dragon at the head of the bed in Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait*" (Lois Drewer, "Margaret of Antioch the Demon-Slayer, East and West: The Iconography of the Predella of the Boston Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine," *Gesta* 32, no. 1 [January 1, 1993]: 11–20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/767014>, 11); "The circumstances of her protracted martyrdom, during which she had emerged miraculously from the belly of a dragon upon making the sign of the cross, gave her considerable appeal to women who hoped that they, like her, would be speedily delivered" (Carole Rawcliffe, "Women, Childbirth, and Religion in Later Medieval England," in *Women and Religion in Medieval England*, ed. Diana Wood [Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003], 100–101); "Margaret of Antioch was the most trusted of protectors for parturient women: the martyrdom story of this saint involved her escape from the belly of a dragon after she made the sign of the cross. She came to embody a mother's hope that her child would be delivered whole from her own belly" (Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* [Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012], 138); "Through tales of her delivery from the dragon's belly St. Margaret became associated with safe passage in childbirth; she is the patron saint of women in labour, and copies of the Anglo-Norman *Life of St. Margaret* were even placed on the breast of women in childbirth to act as a charm" (Charity Scott-Stokes, *Women's Books of Hours in Medieval England* [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012], 118).

57 Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "The Apple's Message," 53.

58 Other than the implication that Margaret's sainthood is accomplished through this pain and suffering.

59 Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Not of Woman Born*, 10.

60 Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Not of Woman Born*, 10.

- 61 Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Not of Woman Born*, 11.
- 62 And, as Dr. Ferdinand Lamaze and later obstetricians have noted, calm and comfort promote good labor!
- 63 “Ga we nu forðre, ant loki we hwuch wunne ariseð þrefter i burþerne of bearn, hwen þet streon in þ awakeneð ant waxeð, ant hu monie earmðen anan awakenið þerwið, þe wurcheð þe wa inoh, fehteð o þi seolue flesch, ant weorrið wið feole weanen o þin ahne cunde. Ði rudie neb schal leanin, ant ase gres grenin; þine ehnen schule doskin, ant underneoðe wonnin, and of þi breines turnunge þin heaued aken sare. Inwið i þi wombe, swel in þi butte þe bereð þe forð as a weater-bulge, þine þearmes þralunge ant stiches i þi lonke, ant i þi lendene sar eche riue ... Þe cares aþein þi pinunge þrahen bineomeð þe nahtes slepes. Hwen hit þenne þerto kimeð, þet sore sorhfule angoise, þet stronge ant stikinde stiche, þet unroles uuel, þet pine ouer pine, þet wondrinde ȝeomerunge; hwil þu swenchest terwið, ant þine deaðes dute, scheome teke þet sar wið þe alde wifes scheome creft þe cunnen of þet wa-sið” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Middle English Prose*, 30–32).
- 64 Jennifer Wynne Hellwarth, *The Reproductive Unconscious in Medieval and Early Modern England*, Studies in Medieval History and Culture 13 (New York: Routledge, 2002), 8. Additional examples of the bleak chances of child survival include a rate of infant mortality in 11th-century Norwich of 60%, instructions in an Anglo-Saxon charm to induce labor that required women to take grave dirt from one of their other deceased children, and the account of Gurwain the Tanner “who made a pilgrimage to the tomb of the boy martyr William of Norwich ... in the hopes of saving the only one of his six sons to survive infancy” (Rawcliffe, “Women, Childbirth, and Religion,” 94).
- 65 Rawcliffe, “Women, Childbirth, and Religion,” 93.
- 66 Hellwarth, *The Reproductive Unconscious*, 46.
- 67 See BL Harley 2974 f. 165v (1460–70, NE France) in which Margaret emerges from a dragon that appears to have furry dog-like ears; the “furry” dragon of BL Royal 19 B XVII f. 167v (1382, Paris); most especially the c.1500 image of “The Marriage of Saint Catherine” at the Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, Budapest featuring Margaret with a small dragon on a leash.
- 68 Examples include the Burnet Psalter (AUL MS 25, 15th century) f. 26v and Walters Manuscript W.168 f.222r (1425–1450, Utrecht).
- 69 Margaret herself even makes this allusion when she prays that God should save her from “the horns of unicorns.”
- 70 Jean-Pierre Albert, “La Légende de Sainte Marguerite: Un Mythe Maïeutique?,” *Razo, Cahiers Du Centre d’Etudes Médiévales de l’Université de Nice*, no. 8 (1988): 25.
- 71 Albert, “La Légende de Sainte Marguerite,” 26.
- 72 Examples including the “sori wombe” of the SEL version and the “*de utero*” of the Paris version.
- 73 See the image of the Virgin and Christ child in BL Arundel 83 f. 131v (c. 1310, SE England) in which the Virgin is seated and resting her feet upon a dragon and a lion. Margaret appears astride a similar dragon in the lower right corner.
- 74 Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Not of Woman Born*, 11.
- 75 “*Ecce subito de angulo carceris exiebat draco horribilis totus uariis coloribus deauratus capilli et barba eius aurea. Videbantur eius ut ferrum acutissimum dentes. Oculi eius uelut flamma ignis splendebant, et de naribus eius ignis et fumus exiebat, et lingua eius anhelabat super collum eius, et gladius utraque parte acutus in manu eius uidebatur. Erat enim terribilis et foetum faciebat in carcerem ab ipso igne qui exiebat de ore draconis. Sancta autem Margareta facta est ut herba pallida et formido mortis cecidit in eam et confringebantur omnia ossa eius ... draco aperto ore posuit os suum*

super caput beate Margaretae et expandit linguam suam super calcaneum eius et degluttivit eam in uentre suum. Sed crux Christi, quam fecerat sibi beata Margareta, ipsa crevit in ore <draconis et in duas partes eum diuisit. Beata autem Margareta exiuit de utero> draconis nullum dolorem in se habens” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 204–206).

- 76 Nevertheless, men were never entirely excluded from the process and eventually usurped feminine authority. See Monica Helen Green, *Making Women’s Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 77 Even these few accounts are rather sparse, see Adrian Wilson, “The Ceremony of Childbirth and Its Interpretation,” in *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren*, ed. Valerie A. Fildes (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), 68–107.
- 78 Hellwarth, *The Reproductive Unconscious*, 5.
- 79 Hellwarth, *The Reproductive Unconscious*, 6.
- 80 Hellwarth, *The Reproductive Unconscious*, 8. Hellwarth largely derives this ritual from such sources as the medieval *Trotula* texts (a collection of writings attributed to an 11th-century woman of the same name, including *De passionibus mulierum curandarum*, *De ornat*, *Trotula major*, *Trotula minor*, and the *Practica secundum Trotum*), the “Sekeness of Wymmen” (a common gynecological text in Middle English), Eucharius Rösslin’s *Der Swangern frawen und he bammen rosztgarten* (The Rose Garden for Pregnant Women and Midwives (1513) including Thomas Raynald’s English translation of the text, *The Byrth of Mankynde* (1540)), Percival Willughby’s 1660 edition of *Observations in Midwifery*, William Sermon’s *The Ladies Companion* (1671), and Jane Sharp’s *The Midwives Book, or the whole art of Midwifery discovered; directing child-bearing women how to behave themselves* (1671).
- 81 Once more, in the Paris version, “degluttivit eam in uentre suum” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 204); in the Katherine Group version, “forswelh into his wide wombe” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 60); and in the *SEL* version “He[o] wende into a sori wombe” (D’Evelyn and Mill, *The South English Legendary*, 297).
- 82 Rawcliffe cites a similar picture of the suffering of pregnant women by Osbert of Clare (Rawcliffe, “Women, Childbirth, and Religion,” 92).
- 83 This terror is attested to in the Paris version when the narrator declares “Now she had forgotten because of her terror that God had heard her prayer and that she had said ‘Show me who fights against me.’”
“*Oblita enim erat propter pauorem quod Deus exaudiuit orationem eius et quod dixerat, ‘Demonstra mihi qui mecum pugnat’*” (Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, 204).
- 84 Hellwarth, *The Reproductive Unconscious*, 9.
- 85 The time over which these three periods were stretched likely had much to do with the socio-economic class of the women undergoing birth: upper-class women likely enjoyed extended periods of time away from household duties, while lower-class women were no doubt called back sooner by virtue of necessity. Of course, some period of recovery would have been necessary even in the absence of the birthing ritual described by Hellwarth; it may be that the birthing ritual she describes makes a virtue out of the necessity of recovery.
- 86 Rawcliffe notes the spiritual risks to childbirth: “Because of her uncleanness, a woman who died in childbirth could not expect burial inside a church, while one whose body retained an unbaptized infant might well be interred *outside* the churchyard and the Christian community. Significantly ... the prayers written on medieval birth girdles invariable promised the mother that she would

- survive long enough to receive the sacrament and see her child christened” (Rawcliffe, “Women, Childbirth, and Religion,” 95).
- 87 See Margaret’s prayers for surcease from her suffering and the strength to confront her opponents spoken during her tortures prior to the prison interlude.
- 88 Rawcliffe, “Women, Childbirth, and Religion,” 97.
- 89 “I þet hus þer wummon pineð o childe, sone se ha munneð mi nome ant mi pine, Lauerd, hihendliche help hire ant her hire bene; ne I þe hus ne beo iboren na mislmet bearn, nowðer halt ne houeret, nowðer dumbe ne deaf ne ideruet of deofle” (Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose*, 78).
- 90 It strikes me that this may be the very reason that the author chooses to leave Margaret’s swallowing – so replete with dangerous overtones of carnality and sexual succumbing – in the Katherine Group narrative. Certainly, other authors such as Jacobus de Voragine and the author of the Rebendorf version had no problem rejecting the account when it suited them. Contrary to this, the author of the Katherine Group version, despite the importance he places on the virgins in his audience, is willing to leave this damning scene relatively unaltered.
- 91 Reames, *Middle English Legends*, 162.
- 92 The presence of such a book in the lying-in chamber would also be another boon for Margaret’s pregnant adherents. As I noted previously, shortly before birth, women would select female friends and family members who would participate in the birth, individuals known as “gossips.” These women would aid their laboring associate, performing necessary functions as dictated by the midwife and providing much needed comfort to their companion. It is among this gossip that Margaret likely found herself.
- As Patrick Geary has noted, saints occupied a peculiar position between living and dead. While they had passed from this world, their presence abided in the physical remains of their life, be it the actual relics of their body that they left behind or a church that had been dedicated to the saint. In effect, the saint was a part of whatever community held his or her remains and was expected to act on behalf of the community to which it was introduced (see Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978] and *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994]).
- The codex of Margaret’s Life – or the recitation of her Life in the case of those found in verses – was no different. By having a copy of the Life read during labor, the gossip was not only reminding the parturient mother of Margaret’s success in her “labors,” but also introducing a new member to the circle of women participating in the birth: St. Margaret herself.
- 93 Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture*, 126.
- 94 See Wendy R. Larson, “The Role of Patronage and Audience in the Cults of Sts Margaret and Marina of Antioch,” in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women, and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Samantha J.E. Riches and Sarah Salih (New York: Routledge, 2002), 25.
- 95 Although it is unclear whether this was via an actual version of the Caligula text, a precursor to it (a “Pre-Caligula” to mirror Clayton and Magennis’ Pre-Mombricitus), or a hybridization of both Lives as the Wace likely was.

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Conclusion

The metamorphosis of monsters

In the Paris version, Theotimus begins his narration by describing the state of the world in which he resides. In those days, the followers of Christ suffered in His name and were martyred, while the people that surrounded them worshipped deaf and dumb idols possessed by demons. A follower of Christ himself, Theotimus sets out to learn the tale of the “most blessed Margaret,” how she fought demons and overcame the world. Before diving into the narrative of Margaret’s martyrdom, he offers simple words of advice to his audience:

All who have ears, listen with your hearts and understand. Men, women, and virgins, imagine yourselves as tender girls in your hearts, and in this manner strive so that you may receive the salvation of your soul and eternal rest with the just who have been crowned by the Lord.¹

The meaning of these words is as pregnant as one of Margaret’s petitioners. Theotimus first pleads for attention, calling his readers to consider his words, the story of Margaret. That he asks them to listen with their hearts is an indication that there is a deeper meaning in the story than mere events: his audience is meant to understand something greater than the surface narration. Following this injunction, Theotimus instructs his readers as to how they might realize this greater truth: imagine yourselves as tender girls, as tender a girl as the fifteen year old Margaret herself. This is not a gendered message, *per se*; rather, it is a message to any who might occupy the three accepted genders of Christianity: men, women, and virgins. It is a message to everyone in the audience, a message that offers meaning to all Christians. This message is simple, but profoundly hopeful: by imagining yourself as Margaret, by imitating her, you are given a way to strive for salvation and eternal rest.

On another discursive level, what Theotimus is offering is not unique to Margaret’s *Life*. Imitation of Christ and other figures reaches back into the writings of Paul when he declares in 1 Thessalonians 1: 5–7:

For our Gospel came unto you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance, as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers

[*imitatores*, in the Vulgate] of us and of the Lord, having received the Word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Ghost, so that ye were examples to all who believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

The spiritual imitation of Christ and the saints continued through the early church where it found some of its most sublime expressions in the Middle Ages.²

The world of the perpetual present

This call to imitation creates a sense of continuity between the “then” of the early church and the “now” of the medieval reader/listener. Margaret’s *Lives* further magnify this sense of continuity, creating what I have termed the world of the perpetual present. In this world, Margaret’s time and place (4th-century Antioch) colocates with the time and place of the reader. While Margaret’s redactors enhance this continuity through a variety of different devices, the two main approaches that I have addressed here are devices that bring the reader/listener into the scene that they are reading and those that impose the reader’s/listener’s context onto the scene itself.

Those devices that bring the reader/listener into the scene create a sense of intimacy with the text, a feeling that the text is speaking directly to the reader/listener. Considering that Margaret’s narrative is one of suffering and eventual triumph, it is not surprising that her monstrous antagonists are the lens through which this sense of intimacy is filtered.

In the first chapter, I showed that the Paris version and the Katherine Group version contain scenes in which the audience is invited to participate in the narrative. In the former, the presence of Theotimus (a figure who previously claimed that he, like the audience, only knew Margaret through reading her *Life*) at the prison window beckons the audience to watch as Margaret is consumed by the dragon and battles with the black demon. At arguably the most important part in Margaret’s *Life*, the audience is encouraged to feel the heat of the dragon’s flame and see the colors of its hair. In the Katherine Group version, the sudden presence of a group of women at the prison window invites Margaret’s female readers – particularly her virginal, anchoritic readers – to imagine themselves in Margaret’s cell and feel the fear that the dragon invokes. In both cases, the time is not *then* but *now* and the location is wherever the *Life* was read.

The versatile nature of the dragon allowed it to be read as both an *imitatio* for mothers and virgins. For mothers, the dragon was a symbol of labor and birth, the end result of succumbing to sexual temptation. By imitating Margaret’s battle with the dragon, mothers hoped to emerge from their own battle with labor and birth whole and

unharméd, just as Margaret herself did. This promise of safety (regardless of how it was interpreted) offered hope and comfort to women, and Margaret's presence in the birthing room through the presence of her *Life* and memory was a source of community for women involved in the labor process. For virgins, the dragon was a source of fear rather than hope. The dragon represented everything that they strove to overcome: the threat of sexual temptation. In their daily lives, such men and women would have struggled against such temptation and, like Margaret, hoped to face such an encounter and emerge "unstained."

The speech of the black demon and Olibrius' identity suggest a similar fluidity of time and space. In each of the black demon's speeches analyzed in the third chapter, the redactor places sexual prescriptions and proscriptions into the demon's dialogue. While this certainly served a didactic purpose, it also added to the intimate sense of the present in the narrative: the demon was not only speaking with Margaret but also directly to the intended audience. Thus, the demon's speech was not something recorded at an earlier date for later consumption, but a missive delivered to the reader or listener that targeted their actions in the present, as if the demon was simply relating the things that it had seen the audience do as it stood invisibly by their sides.

Likewise, while a Roman pagan prefect could theoretically be tied down to one specific place and one specific time, Olibrius is not simply a Roman pagan prefect. Rather, his religious identity is in a constant state of flux and contains a shifting admixture of potential identity markers. This shifting admixture of religious identities maintains the character in a state of the perpetual present, reflecting the current concerns and opponents of Margaret's readers. In each version, Olibrius is not a long dead figure from a bygone age, but is able to reflect the nature of a very real, contemporary opponent that Margaret (and her Christian readers) strove against.

Shards of the "present"

At the same time, the world of the perpetual present must have a bit of the contemporary written into it. If the audience is to recognize their life in Margaret's *Life*, then some of their own experience must be redacted into it. While the draconic visitation reaches across time via its links to the *Life of St. Anthony* and the *Life of St. Benedict* and its resonances to both virgins and mothers, the other monsters of Margaret's *Life* bear a more personal touch.

The black demon's speech can be used to directly address the sexual behavior of specific sections of an audience. Anchoresses reading the

demon's monologue in the Katherine Group version would have caught a glimpse of the trials and tribulations of a woman much like themselves: a woman who innocently placed herself in a position where she might be tempted by the demon of sexual lust. However, this was not a triumphant dialogue on the part of the demon. Instead, the text reveals the means to modify the anchoress' behavior so that she does not fall into the same trap, detailing ideal practices for an anchoress that prevent her from succumbing to sexual temptation. In effect, the narrative offers such women an anchoritic identity to be imitated (Margaret), supplemented by an anchoritic identity to avoid (the unfortunate chaste woman), and a model of behavior that can be used to shore up the difference between the two. The CCC version, on the other hand, contains a unique addition by the redactor. In the midst of its speech, the demon claims that because of its wiles its victims engaged in intercourse with four-footed beasts. This inclusion is a clear indication that the intended audience of the text was not composed only of those who practiced a "monastic and ascetic" lifestyle, but also to the rural, lay audience that was placed under their pastoral care. These speeches are all the more striking due to their dissimilarity from the Mombritius exemplar (the Paris version) that was also analyzed: the latter being focused much more on monastic concerns like masturbation and nocturnal emission. All three narratives show that the black demon's speech was used by redactors to target specific audiences in order to promote desirable sexual behavior,³ either by reinforcing the need for familiar behaviors with the authority of the supernatural or by vilifying practices with which the audience had become too familiar.

Olibrius has the same metamorphic quality: shifting his identity to best suit the perceived nature of the un-Christian to his reader/listener. Though Olibrius presents himself as generally un-Christian to Margaret's audience, redactors periodically "update" the character of Olibrius, thereby foregrounding the relevance of Margaret's struggle for her readers. As the *Life* enters England, the pagan-Jewish nature of Olibrius would have been familiar as un-Christian due to the depiction of pagan and Jewish figures as biblical adversaries. Similarly, as crusading interests became a source of national identity for the English, redactors realigned the character of Olibrius so that Margaret could defeat the looming Saracen threat. In each case, Margaret's opponent is a familiar opponent, one that her readers would have encountered on the street, on crusade, or been taught to fear. Just as Margaret herself was "sealed" in her virginity, her example served to seal the boundaries of Christian sexual identity against the transgression of foreign religious influences, regardless of whether those influences existed at the time of her martyrdom or not.

A socio-cultural history from the monstrous

Perhaps most interestingly, this focus on the monsters has yielded a diachronic socio-cultural history of the *Life* in medieval England. Although Margaret is often depicted as an advocate for women regardless of which *Life* she appears in, the abundance of tropes from the *Life of St. Anthony* and the *Life of St. Benedict* – as well as the Paris version's demon's focus on monastic sexual sins – suggests that the earliest version in England was probably intended for a male monastic community.

Over the next several centuries, women claimed Margaret's narrative as their own as suggested by the changes to Margaret's character. The Margaret of the Paris version is a warrior who confronts demons – as Larson has noted, not unlike her Byzantine “twin” Marina.⁴ Her blessings for childbirth are minimal, require significant economic reserves, and reflect her established role: Margaret does not so much aid women and children in labor as drive away demons in general, demons that might cause an infant to “be born deaf or blind or mute.” Margaret persists in this role with very little change for several centuries, indicating that this image of Margaret as a champion against demons was largely accepted and made use of in her cult. The Tiberius and CCC versions indicate a gradual shift toward more economically reasonable requirements, but Margaret continues to be a champion against demons and offers little in the way of protection during childbirth save for the guarantee that she will ward away demonic disabilities that might afflict the children of her adherents.

Rather than the Mombritius tradition, it is the Caligula tradition (which emerges in England at most a century after the Paris version) which contains the first instance of Margaret's blessings for parturient women. While the Margaret of the Caligula version is hardly focused on childbirth (significantly more of her prayers are devoted to legal issues, both supernatural and mundane), her prayers do include blessings for both mother and child to be safely delivered, requiring only that a candle be placed in a church dedicated to her.

In the absence of Margaret's later role of women's advocate, medieval mothers developed a variety of ways to read Margaret's *Life* to their benefit in labor. Reading the image as a direct mimesis, women may have seen themselves as mimetically giving birth like the dragon. Unlike the dragon, they are saved from a gruesome fate by the *virtus* that Margaret engenders. By considering the dragon as a manifestation of the womb, women instead would have seen Margaret's “birth” as the outcome of a natural process: just as Margaret emerges from the dragon, so too does the child emerge from

the womb, a structure which is meant to “split open.” As Margaret stood astride the dragon, the image of Mary treading upon the serpent would also be present, invoking connotations of safe and painless childbirth. If the dragon is the process of birth, then Margaret underwent torments not unlike those that pregnant women themselves would experience, creating a sympathetic link between Margaret and her adherents. Finally, the image of the dragon may also have been the image of the lying-in room: a womb-like atmosphere in which women underwent a symbolic gestation. In each case, the dragon represented a familiar biological or social reality of childbirth with which women would have been familiar. Through identification with Margaret, these women sought to emerge from their place of labor whole and sound, just as Margaret burst from the dragon without any injury.

The 13th century marked a turning point for the Mombritius tradition in England. First, a surge of interest in Margaret’s cult and the growing effects of the Fourth Lateran Council upon literacy (particularly feminine literacy) precipitated greater feminine involvement in the cult. At the same time, the incorporation of the Caligula version’s blessings for pregnant women into the Mombritius tradition of the *Life* made Margaret a more appealing patron for her growing body of lay adherents.

At the same time, this has little noticeable effect upon the perception of Margaret in the Mombritius tradition. The Katherine Group version slips the Caligula blessings for parturient women into Margaret’s prayers (somewhat abruptly), but never deviates from the image of Margaret as a champion against demons. The *Stanzaic Life*, rather than include such blessings with no explanation as the Katherine Group version did, attempts to rationalize this new addition to the Mombritius tradition by incorporating it under Margaret’s demonic purview: the black demon that accosts Margaret in her cell is no longer a purveyor of sexual sin, but a creature that brutally attacks mothers and infants. By defeating such a demon, the text ties Margaret’s role as a champion over the demonic to her blessings for parturiency.

These blessings must have seen significant use by her adherents. By the time of the SEL version’s redaction, these blessings were so clearly associated with Margaret that the redactor felt no need to rationalize her association with parturiency. Moreover, there was a shift in the character of Margaret herself to reflect this new focus: an identity in which she becomes a women’s advocate and a saint with a personal interest in the survival of her pregnant adherents. This trend continues until the Lydgate *Lyfe* at which point Margaret’s blessings for parturiency eclipse all others, even her blessings for healthy infants.⁵

At the same time, Margaret's *Life* exerts influence (and influence is exerted upon it) elsewhere. The character of Olibrius offers a response from a Christian community toward perceived threats. While indicators of Olibrius' "pagan" identity are on clear display in the early *Lives*, these indicators are gradually eclipsed by Jewish ones that point to Olibrius as a Christ-killer. These indicators of identity would have been instantly recognizable from their biblical contexts.⁶ This eclipse is notable as it occurred during the rise of a Jewish populace in medieval England. Those manuscripts that feature Olibrius as "more" Jewish would have allowed their contemporary readers to contextualize rising violence against Jews (such as that in the First Crusade) as well as antipathy toward Jews brought into their midst by the Norman Conquest.⁷ Conversely, the "more" Saracen Olibrius reflects popular concern over the crusades and the romantic literature trope of the "defeated Sultan." This shift in opponent is also suggestive of a shift in use, with the later poetic *Lives* likely being a source of entertainment comparable to the romantic literature from which they draw. Moreover, all of the narratives reflect sexual proscriptions that circulated at the time of their redaction, proscriptions that drew strict boundaries between Christians and proximal religious groups, either in law⁸ or in literature.⁹

Reflections on monsters, time, and saints

This book has also suggested the necessity of understanding a Saint's *Life* diachronically before it can be understood synchronically. To use a contemporary example, when one reads *Hamlet* for the first time, it is unlikely to actually be the first time someone has encountered the text or a portion thereof. With some twenty film versions and relatively constant stage-play performance, not to mention loose adaptations (e.g., *The Lion King*) and the play's influence upon popular culture (one is likely to encounter the question "to be or not to be" before the man who asks it), it is likely that individuals reading the play have already formed ideas about it prior to reading.

It is the same for Saints' *Lives* literature and its medieval audience. While a particular version of Margaret might be the only text with which a medieval reader/listener was familiar, they were likely to have encountered Margaret in other areas of life prior to the text. From medical procedures to stage plays to sermons, elements of Margaret's narrative were likely well known to an individual before they had heard it in full. This view would undoubtedly have colored their understanding of Margaret's *Life*.

Thus, it is necessary to understand the general thrust and scope of a Saint's *Life* within a specific geographical area. With only a synchronic

analysis, elements that the redactor adds, subtracts, comments upon, or modifies are treated with the same import as other elements of the *Life*. Although not all of these changes are necessarily intentional, in Margaret's *Life*, I have shown that many of these elements can be linked to the didactic needs of the redactor or to the power exerted by a particular *Life*'s audience. Given the common patterning of Saints' Lives literature that has caused some to eschew their study, this is likely a commonality that will be found in other Saints' *Lives*, a commonality that can serve to enrich research on these fascinating literary pieces and the historical contexts from which they emerge.

Once this diachronic work is done, it may be more productive in some cases for synchronic studies to focus on the antagonists of the *Life* rather than the protagonists. As noted, analyses of the saints in Saints' Lives literature have offered valuable socio-cultural data regarding adherents in the Middle Ages. In the saint's actions, the saint's adherents found a model for everything from efficacious speech to constructing a virginal identity "from scratch." Nevertheless, this picture is incomplete if the saint's antagonists, monstrous or otherwise, are not taken into account.

Moreover, as I have shown in Margaret's *Lives*, the saint's antagonists often act as both the lens for the perpetual present and the hooks upon which redactors hang contemporary elements for their audience. In the former case, since the focal point of Margaret's *Lives* is her suffering, the narrative locations that audience members are meant to identify and imitate are populated by her adversaries. Regarding the latter, the radical singularity of the sacred allows for relatively slow shifts in character over time, whereas the antagonists – as radically profane beings – are not bound by such restrictions.

Ultimately, the relationship between the saint and the antagonists of a particular *Life* creates a contrast that forms the identity of the saint, the same identity that the saint's adherents imitate. While the saint carries positive indicators of identity such as "remain a virgin," "trust in God," and "speak against your persecutors," the antagonists carry negative indicators of identity such as "do not copulate with the un-Christian," "do not have sex with animals," and "do not worship idols." Both positive and negative indicators of identity combine in the saint's *Life* to produce the saint's *imitatio*: an imitation that not only encourages desired behaviors but wards away undesirable ones as well. In contemplating this identity, the practitioner of saintly *imitatio* incorporates both the message of the saint and that of the saint's antagonist into their identity as a Christian.

In this way, the monstrous antagonists of Margaret's *Life* shape the Christian identity of Margaret's adherents just as surely as Margaret herself. Under this monstrous influence, Margaret's singularity – and

thus, her *imitatio* – takes on a radical multiplicity that allowed her to meet the needs of multiple audiences stretched over a span of several centuries. Through these monsters, virgins were instructed, mothers consoled, and the medieval laity – men and women alike – guided to a “proper” Christian sexual identity. Truly, Margaret had something to offer “all who had ears to listen,” but often, it was the monsters who were really speaking.

Notes

- 1 “*Omnes aures habentes audite corde, et intelligite uiri; mulieres, uirgines, <uelut> tenere puelle proponite <uos> in cordibus uestris, et ita laborate, ut accipiat salutem anime uestrae et requiem sempiternam cum iustis a Domino coronatis*” (Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 194).
- 2 See for instance Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, Publications of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982) and Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).
- 3 A more thorough study of the various speeches of the black demon might indicate a greater variance of sexual proscriptions, offering more insight into the varied sexual landscape of medieval England (or Europe as a whole). This would likely require considerable archival work in order to note variations between different Mombritius-style versions that have not been transcribed.
- 4 See Wendy R. Larson, “The Role of Patronage and Audience in the Cults of Sts Margaret and Marina of Antioch,” in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women, and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Samantha J.E. Riches and Sarah Salih (New York: Routledge, 2002), 24–25.
- 5 At this time, the dragon as a symbol of parturiency also became popular enough to have gained notice by the author of the SEL version. Unfortunately, the question of when the dragon’s consumption of Margaret arose as a symbol for parturiency has been left dangling by this book. As noted previously, a more detailed study of the art historical and non-*Life* text remnants (e.g., Skemer’s birthing amulets) would be required to further inform this question. Moreover, there is a strong possibility that such a study would not offer any conclusive evidence: as Larson has pointed out, the unofficial power that women exerted upon the *Life* is notoriously difficult to trace.
- 6 For example, on Olbrius’ worship of idols (his most salient “pagan” feature), see Lv 19:4, Is 44:9–20, Rom 1:23, Acts 17:29; for Jewish associations with the death of Christ, see Mt 26: 1–5, Mt 27:24–25, Jn 8: 37–47, 1 Thes 2:14–16.
- 7 Regarding the possibility of further research, although questions of ethnicity/religious diversity were addressed in this work, they were primarily tied to issues of sexual boundaries within the Christian community. The Old English Lives offer a distinctly more “Jewish” Olbrius than the Paris version. Considering that these Lives both predate William of Norwich’s more direct condemnation of Jewish communities in England, these Lives (and others produced within a similar time frame) may be an important link in the changing conceptions of Judaism in England that led to the beginning of the blood libel.
- 8 Such as the 13th-century law code *Fleta*, which prescribed death for those who would cohabit with a “Jew or Jewess” (Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and*

- Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* [New York: Routledge, 1990], 106).
- 9 Such as the rejection of sexual advances from Saracen men and women by Christians in romantic literature pertaining to the crusades.

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